

MARGINALITY: A THEOLOGICAL INDICTMENT:
REFERRING TO THE PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP TO
THE NATURAL WORLD

A professional project
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The School of Theology at Claremont
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

by
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This professional project, completed by

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ABSTRACT

Modern Western culture, with all its staggering display of technical and scientific knowledge is an impressive monument to the success of the human being as an organism. But while the human being has benefited from the natural world on its climb to success, the natural world has suffered grave ecological damage from the growth of human civilization. Currently, the earth and all it supports suffer from poisons introduced into the environment and from resource loss due to the voracious appetites of Western technological society. Unless something basic in the human/nature relationship is quickly altered and present destructive, exploitative patterns broken, life on this planet may not survive the next century.

A look into the constructs of the Western human value hierarchy and world-view reveals a perceived rift between humanity and the natural world. Many aspects of Western culture consciously and unconsciously promote this fragmented view of reality which in turn, lends legitimacy to destructive patterns of behavior.

When the destructive patterns of modern cultural behavior are no longer considered to be acceptable, then correctives can be charted which are in the service of the continuance and well-being of all life on the planet.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

Given the critical state of the ecology of planet Earth and the lack of sustainable ecological trends in Western economic and technological practices, this project addresses the problem of the contemporary notion of 'marginality' as it is evidenced in exploitative Western attitudes toward natural resources and the natural world.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The notion of 'marginality' in American thought results in 1) the dehumanization of the human spirit and 2) resource stress and loss. This phenomenon can be observed most clearly in how society evaluates agricultural land and land use patterns.

This earth and all it sustains may be headed toward destruction due to the fact that the Western mind tends to think in terms of the notion of 'marginality' of natural resources. We humans live with a sense of unbridled self-indulgence with little thought to future generations. Because of this attitude and subsequent behavior, our air

and water are polluted, our soil is being depleted, our continents are too crowded and our human spirit is degraded. Western people are a people afraid to look into the future because what lies awaiting can be anticipated rather clearly. If the world is not burst asunder by a nuclear holocaust, it may slowly choke on waste, or exhaust itself in essential resource loss unless something basic to the human thought process is altered and replaced. The thesis of this project is that this 'something' is thinking in terms of the notion of 'marginality'. 'Marginal' thinking views the created world as of little or no intrinsic value aside from its usefulness for the satisfaction of immediate human wants. To replace this 'marginal' thinking with a spirituality that acknowledges all resources as intrinsically precious is a necessary step towards a world in which all life enjoys continuance.

This project is vitally important to the life of the church in that it is critically important for the preservation and continuation of life itself. The survival of the church is dependent upon the survival of the human species and the survival of the human species is dependent upon the ability of the earth to support life.

The project is also important to the life of the church because in many ways the notion of 'marginality' has its foundations in our misunderstanding of the biblical term 'dominion'. Part of the solution to the problem of the

notion of 'marginality' lies in the church's role of awakening in the human being a fresh understanding of the original Hebrew concept of 'dominion'.

The project is relevant to the professional leadership of the church. Not only will the project call the minister to re-examine the prevailing interpretation of the creation account and our current understanding of 'dominion', but the project will also call the minister to be prophetic and to awaken in her or his congregation and surrounding community an understanding of the dangerous path humanity walks and that where humanity walks, the entire eco-sphere is impacted. At this point in time, humanity is almost entirely responsible for the flourishing or the destruction of life on this planet.

THESIS

Basic to the correction of contemporary trends toward resource depletion and human violence with tendencies toward the stress of the entire eco-sphere of planet Earth is the need to replace the notion of 'marginality' with a spirituality that acknowledges all resources as being intrinsic.

DEFINITION OF MAJOR TERMS

Marginality:

The term 'marginality' is used in a rather unique sense. Webster's Dictionary lists as one of the definitions of 'marginal': "...of or pertaining to a limit of change in economic conditions determining the point at which any given process, action or the like, will cease to be or act." For the purposes of this project, the definition of 'marginality' is used in an ecological sense. 'Marginality' is a mind-set. It is the fallacious notion that the value of the natural world is established by its usefulness to humanity. This utilitarian view of creation perceives that: 1) natural resources on the 'fringes' of human economic usefulness and profit-earning ability are also of little or no intrinsic value; and 2) resources of great usefulness, such as oil or top-soil, are considered expendable due to their high profit-making potential and are therefore not regarded as intrinsically valuable.

A 'marginal' perspective views reality as lacking integrity. In this fragmented understanding of reality, the human realm is separated from the realm of the rest of creation, thus allowing for unchecked exploitation of a world with which humanity is out of touch. The notion of 'marginality' denies the natural world as a manifestation of

God's creation and robs it of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will.

This notion of 'marginality' can be most clearly observed in how society evaluates agricultural land and land use patterns. For example, if a piece of land is such that it costs more money to make the land 'pay-off' than the land is able to return in economic terms, the land is considered to be of 'marginal' value and is often called a 'waste-land'. This tendency to value land only in relation to its economic pay-back or return obscures from our vision the intrinsic significance of that land. The notion of 'marginality' also is the major cause of the destruction of arable land due to over-farming and erosion. Economic gain has for centuries justified humanity's short-range and visionless appetite with the resultant effect of turning rich soil into deserts.

Bio-sphere:

This term is to be understood to mean the entire ecology of planet Earth. Everything pertaining to Earth from the farthest reaches of its thin atmosphere to the planet's core is a part of the Earth's bio-sphere.

Natural Resources:

Resource by definition means anything upon which humanity depends for support. This definition is clearly based on the notion of 'marginality'; that is, that which has value for human beings is a resource. Nevertheless, one of the goals of this project is to present a view that acknowledges all of the created order as having value intrinsically, which means that all things of the created order have value to humanity as well. Therefore, a natural resource could be defined as anything that exists naturally within the bio-sphere upon which human beings and non-human beings alike depend for support of some kind.

The term 'dominion' will be defined as a part of the method of the project.

WORK PREVIOUSLY DONE IN THE FIELD

In recent years there has been a great deal of work done in related areas, but thus far, work that specifically deals with the contemporary notion here labeled 'marginality' has not been encountered. On the other hand, many people have written on topics which deal with a facet of 'marginality'. For example, C. Dean Freudenberger has probably come the closest to what this project hopes to say.

The present situation in our society and in our Church calls urgently for an Ethic of Responsibility built upon

a deeper understanding of our relationship to nature...
 ...Our dominion is limited by the rights of the land.
 As established and shaped by God the land has its own
 integrity in His eyes and God's word commands us to
 respect the land not to exploit it or manipulate it
 compulsively.¹

W.H. Murdy proposes that much of the problem of the contemporary notion termed here as 'marginality' springs from a modern view of Anthropocentrism. He states, "To be anthropocentric is to affirm that mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature- by man."² Yet in our present state of dwindling resources, wide-spread pollution and overcrowding, Murdy goes on to say, "The production of ever more human biomass at the expense of ever greater environmental degradation is anti-anthropocentric in that it is mal-adaptive for the species."³ His point is that humans will preserve the ecology of the world because of our anthropocentrism in that it is in our best interests to view ourselves in the context of the whole eco-sphere. "Anthropocentrism is proposed as a valid and necessary point of view for mankind to adopt for consideration of his place in nature."⁴

Lynn White Jr. blames what what this projects calls the contemporary notion of 'marginality' on Christianity.⁵ He states:

Man shares in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except perhaps Zoroastrianism) not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.⁶

Also, "...By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."⁷ White proposes an alternative Christian view based on the model of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis "...tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the ideal of man's limitless rule of creation."⁸

The essayists of Faith and Science in an Unjust World feel that the modern human being is not recognizing herself or himself as possessing the capacity for creation.⁹ This denial of our creative capacity is a denial of our humanity as such, and a denial that we are in the image of the Creator. Human creativity:

presupposes the distinctive combination and interrelatedness of action and contemplation, of time and eternity, of matter and spirit... ...The problem of today is the problem of humanity, the problem of saving the human individual from disintegration; it is the problem of the vocation and goal of humanity.¹⁰

Charles Birch states:

If the life of the world is to be sustained and renewed, as directed in Genesis, it will have to be with a new sort of science and technology governed by a new sort of economics and politics."..."Spiritual confusion prevails in the modern world about the relationship of man to nature in a technological culture."..."The task, as I see it, includes the rediscovery of the fundamental unity of the human and non-human worlds without surrendering any truths about man. Indeed I would say it is to rediscover the unity of the whole creation in the light of the Christian understanding of man.¹¹

Albert Schweitzer calls for the need of a new, more complete ethic in the West.¹² He writes that:

...If the domain of ethics is limited to the relations

of man to man, then every effort to arrive at a fundamental ethical principle which has an absolutely binding content is hopeless from the beginning. The absolute and universal belong together. If there really is a fundamental principle of ethics, it must somehow refer to the relation of man to life as such in all of its manifestations.¹³

In a sermon entitled "Reverence for Life", found in a collection of Schweitzer's sermons by that same name, Schweitzer maintains that "Reverence for the infinity of life means removal of the alienation, restoration of empathy, compassion, sympathy."¹⁴

It is our duty to share and maintain life. Reverence concerning all life is the greatest commandment in its most elementary form. Or expressed in negative terms: 'Thou shalt not kill.' ...Much talk is heard in our times about building a new human race. How are we to build a new humanity? Only by leading men toward a true, inalienable ethic of our own, which is capable of further development. But this goal cannot be reached unless countless individuals will transform themselves from blind men into seeing ones and begin to spell out the great commandment which is: Reverence for Life. Existence depends more on reverence for life than the law and the prophets. Reverence for life comprises the whole ethic of love in its deepest and highest sense.¹⁵

Herman Daly suggests that the Western mind and economy is suffering from 'terminal hyper-growthmania'.¹⁶

Growthmania is the attitude in economic theory that begins with the theological assumption of infinite wants, and then with infinite hubris goes on to presume that the original sin of infinite wants has its redemption vouchsafed by the omnipotent savior of technology, and that the first commandment is to produce more and more goods for more and more people, world without end.¹⁷

Daly maintains that the costs of growth in GNP outweighs the benefits when:

the decreasing marginal benefit of extra GNP becomes less than the increasing marginal cost. The marginal

benefit is measured by the market value of extra goods and services- i.e., the increment in GNP itself in value units. But what statistical series measures the cost? Answer: none! That is growthmania; literally not counting the costs of growth.¹⁸

Daly's point is that as we press against the carrying capacity of our physical environment, the costs loom larger and larger.¹⁹

Environmental degradation is an iatrogenic disease induced by economic physicians who treat the basic malady of unlimited wants by prescribing unlimited economic growth. We experience environmental degradation in the form of increased scarcity of clean air, pure water, relaxed moments, etc. But the only way the growthmania paradigm knows to deal with scarcity is to recommend growth.²⁰

Daly convicts the 'growth paradigm' as being a senile and terminal ideology which must be replaced if our ecosystem is to survive. The new paradigm Daly suggests as a replacement for the 'growth paradigm' is one modeled closely after John Stuart Mill's idea of the steady-state economy.

The steady state is defined as an economy in which the total population and the total stock of physical wealth are maintained constant at some desired levels by a 'minimal' rate of maintenance throughput.²¹

Daly suggests that the necessity of a steady state follows immediately from physical first principles. The world is finite, the ecosystem is a steady state. The human economy is a subsystem of the steady-state ecosystem.²²

For Daly, the steady-state paradigm is realistic because it takes the physical laws of nature as its initial premise. However, he also recognizes that the "physically steady economy absolutely requires moral growth beyond the present level."²³ The steady-state paradigm enlists the

moral force of the concept of 'wholeness'.

Ecology is whole. It brings together the broken, analyzed, alienated, fragmented pieces of man's image of the world...Unless the physical, the social, and the moral dimensions of our knowledge are integrated in a unified paradigm offering a vision of wholeness, no solutions to our problems are likely.²⁴

Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., in their book The Liberation of Life, have also suggested that the survival of life on this planet is dependant upon a paradigm change in the human perspective.²⁵ They propose that the 'mechanistic', 'vitalistic', and 'emergent evolution' models should be replaced with an 'ecological' model. The 'ecological' paradigm:

sees humanity as a part of the natural world, a very remarkable part in which the element of transcending, present in all life, is extremely prominent. For them human beings transcend most successfully as they respect most sensitively the conditions of all life. They can learn to use the limited resources of the world more efficiently and more effectively. By attentiveness to the strategies of life, they can learn what true growth is, they can develop appropriate goals and find deep satisfaction in their attainment. This is a religion of life. It is to place faith in Life.²⁶

The religion of Life:

calls for a just and sustainable society and that this requires the abandonment of the dream, or nightmare, of unlimited growth in population and consumption. ...From the perspective of the religion of Life it is obvious that the ideology of growth misunderstands the true nature of growth and aims at a monstrosity that will destroy life.²⁷

The question addressed by Cobb and Birch is "not really whether human beings will accommodate themselves to the earth's capacity to support them, but how."²⁸ Are the limits to be reached in a catastrophic way, or will human

beings "...engineer a smooth transition, recognizing the limits, to a just and sustainable future?"²⁹

There are many voices calling the modern individual into accountability and almost as many voices calling us to commit ourselves to a major paradigm shift. While the arguments are varied in their identification of the problem and in correctives, most all agree on the urgency of our planet's situation. The limits of the carrying capacity of our bio-sphere are critically near, and some massive changes in our relationship to nature must come about. This project cannot possibly hope to identify all the contributing factors which have led to the formation of the contemporary notion termed here as 'marginality'. But this project will incorporate work from within the fields of biblical scholarship, theology, philosophy, psychology, economics and land management to show that 'marginality' is deeply engrained in Western thought. Once 'marginality' has been identified in some of its many forms, perhaps the reader will be sensitized to the presence and threat of 'marginal' thinking in day to day life. The presenting problem of this project is how to remove 'marginal' thinking and substitute it with a spirituality that acknowledges all resources as being intrinsically precious. What this project intends to do is: 1) look at some of the roots of 'marginality' located in contemporary biblical interpretations of the creation account and the meanings we have ascribed to the

word 'dominion'; 2) observe that Christianity with its radical monotheism removed the 'spirits' from nature resulting in humanity's view of nature as an object; 3) note the perpetuation of 'marginality' in western anthropocentric and psychological ideologies; all of which have been important contributing factors to our contemporary notion of 'marginality'. Once many of the facets of the notion of 'marginality' are laid open to scrutiny, perhaps directions toward the solution to the problem can be charted.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT:

The precise intent for the project is to look at the roots of the contemporary notion of 'marginality' as described above, propose redirections to the understandings that have given rise to the fatal notion of 'marginality' and finally suggest a model toward a New Homiletic for Pastoral Ministry that may help remove 'marginal' thinking and facilitate a change in the human relationship to the world.

The contemporary notion of 'marginality' in American thought results in 1) the dehumanization of the human spirit, 2) resource stress and loss, and 3) resource exhaustion. Basic to contemporary trends toward resource depletion and human violence with tendencies toward the stress of the entire bio-sphere of planet Earth is the need

to replace the notion of 'marginality' with a spirituality that acknowledges all resources as being intrinsically precious... for they are manifestations of God's creation, creative spirit and purpose and are essential for the evolution of God's will.

PROCEEDURE FOR INTEGRATION

This project integrates the use of biblical exegesis with examination of the thoughts and theologies of those listed in the bibliography in an effort to determine the roots of the contemporary notion of 'marginality'. After the research and compiling of information was completed, the next proceedure was to develop a way to present the information through the local church in a manner that will challenge the local church member to attempt to break away from the 'marginal' thinking mode. Thus, what is called for is a new Homelitic for Pastoral Ministry.

The tools and methods of the project will be exegesis and primary research. A sermon dealing with the Christian relationship of responsibility will be included as an appendix. Thus far the methodologies of the authors examined have been essays primarily addressing the scientific and theological communities.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter II. traces the development of the contemporary notion of 'marginality' as it is evidenced in land and land use patterns. This is an attempt to identify 'marginality' as an undesirable contemporary notion underlying current Western paradigms of land and resource use which must now be examined and replaced.

Chapter III. uncovers the roots of 'marginality' in Old Testament biblical exegesis, Christian monotheism, Western anthropocentrism and in the very psychology of the Western individual. In this chapter is an attempt to distinguish 'marginal' trends in anthropocentric thinking and identify errant biblical understandings which have set the foundations for the contemporary notion of 'marginality' that now need to be corrected.

Chapter IV. presents an alternative, transcendent understanding of creation and humanity which is free from the destructive notion of 'marginality'. In the light of the findings of Chapter III, this chapter challenges the human being to transcend the current 'marginal' conceptualization of the human/creation relationship, and develop a new paradigm of relationship based on fresh understandings of dominion and creation.

Chapter V. suggests a new understanding of relationship as a model for pastoral ministry. The project

concludes with a sermon to show how this model can find expression in the unique pastoral task of homily.

Endnotes

- 1 C. Dean Freudenberger, The Gift of Land (Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1981) 15.
- 2 W. H. Murdy, "Anthropocentrism: A Modern Version", Science 182 (March 1975) 1168.
- 3 Ibid., 1171.
- 4 Ibid., 1172.
- 5 Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", Science 155: 3767 (March 1967) 1203-1207.
- 6 Ibid., 1205.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 1207.
- 9 Faith and Science in an Unjust World (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 84.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Charles Birch, "Creation, Technology and Human Survival: Called to Replenish the Earth". Address to the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi Kenya, Document no. A1 (December 1, 1975) 10.
- 12 Albert Schweitzer, The Animal World of Albert Schweitzer (Boston:Beacon, 1950) 162.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Albert Schweitzer, Reverance for Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 115.
- 15 Ibid., 116-17.
- 16 Herman E. Daley (ed.) Toward A Steady-State Economy (San Francisco: Freeman, 1973)
- 17 Ibid., 151.
- 18 Ibid., 150.
- 19 Ibid., 149.

20 Ibid., 151.

21 Ibid., 152.

22 Ibid., 153.

23 Ibid., 170.

24 Ibid., 173.

25 Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., The Liberation of Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

26 Ibid., 262.

27 Ibid., 263. The word 'sustainable' is being progressively substituted with the more inclusive word 'regenerative'. To avoid confusion, since the sources quoted in this project still use 'sustainable', the project will also continue to use 'sustainable'. Nevertheless the addition of the notion of renewal implied in the word 'regenerative' is an important addition to the concept of 'sustainability'.

28 Ibid., 264.

29 Ibid.

CHAPTER II

MARGINALITY: A NATURAL DILEMMA

On Friday afternoon, any weekend of the year, thousands of Californians crowd the highways of the Los Angeles basin and retreat to the desert, among other places. Desert recreation has become a booming business in Southern California since motorhomes, pick-up trucks, dune buggies, motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles are the sport equipment of desert recreators. But the dollar cost of the equipment and fuel to power the vehicles is only a fraction of the actual cost of this favorite past-time. The cutting away of fragile hillsides by the tires of desert vehicles, opening the land to severe wind and water erosion; the destruction of delicate desert eco-systems which impede the encroachment of the desert; the pollution of the environment by human and mechanical wastes and the reckless consumption of the world's virtually irreplaceable fossil fuels are but of few of the hidden costs of desert 'fun'. Since the desert cannot be converted into crop land through any economically feasible method, the desert's primary value to humanity seems to lie in its expendability; it is viewed as a valueless commodity, the consumption of which exacts no price of the consumers. After the costs of the vehicles, fuels and time, the desert itself is a "freebee" thrown into the deal.

'Marginality' is perhaps most clearly evidenced in current land and land use patterns. When the long term costs of the destruction of the desert during desert recreation are not considered, then 'marginality' is an unconscious factor in our decision-making process which is responsible for our overlooking certain far-reaching ramifications. But 'marginal' thinking is even more graphically evidenced in the human/land relationship when the long term costs of destruction to land are considered yet are written off as an expense of the venture. Of such is the relationship of modern human civilization to the land.

While modern civilization tends to exploit the land, it is clear that civilization's survival depends on its ability to maintain a healthy relationship to the land. That civilization is dependent upon agriculture is nothing new, in fact it was impossible for civilization to develop prior to the development of agriculture. When human beings were hunters and gatherers, most of the waking hours were spent in search of food. When food became sparse, the hunting-gathering band would move on to where game and other foods were more abundant. Civilization requires time free from searching for food and stability of geographic location. Neolithic agriculture demanded that human beings stay in one location through planting, growing and harvesting seasons. Agriculture also made it possible for

humans to procure more food than they could use, which in turn allowed for the pursuit of other activities. Thus the advent of agriculture was the advent of civilization.

Soil is the living, dynamic bridge where crops convert solar energy to human food energy. Soil spans the gap between death and life, between what was and what is. If it is nurtured it lives; if it is neglected or exploited, it dies and there follows the death of civilization.¹

Food comes from the earth. The land with its waters gives us nourishment. The earth rewards richly the knowing and diligent but punishes the ignorant and slothful. This partnership of land and farmer is the rock foundation of our complex social structure.²

Unfortunately, with the exception of a few cases, the 'partnership of land and farmer' has not been an equitable one. For the most part, human civilization has taken not only the bounty of the land, but has consumed the land itself.

Freudentberger writes,

we have seen that there is very little soil upon the land of planet earth. The continents themselves represent only .4% of the planet's mass. Of the earth's surface, 75% is covered with water (196.8 million square miles). The remaining 25% is dry land (55 million square miles). But, this is only the beginning of the story. Of this 25%, one-fifth is too cold to produce food and fiber; one-fifth is too high and rugged to be inhabited, leaving only two-fifths useful for human life. But, of this two-fifths, there are many areas of poor soil quality, excessive rainfall and marginal grazing resources. One must realize that during historic times (during the past 10,000 to 7,000 years) of human settlements in organized villages, towns and cities, one-half of this original soil and vegetative resource has been destroyed.³

In 1938 and 1939, W.C. Lowdermilk made a report of the history of agriculture as it is physically written on

the face of the land. He studied agriculture where the land had been cultivated for centuries, "and found that soil erosion, deforestation, overgrazing, neglect and conflicts between cultivators and herdsmen have helped topple empires and wipe out entire civilizations."⁴

The United States is not exempt from Lowdermilk's scrutiny. Of the U.S. in 1939, he writes:

we find charming landscapes of fields with red soils and glowing grain fields. But in their midst we find an insidious enemy devouring the land-- stealing it away, ere we are aware, by sheet erosion, rain by rain, washing it down into the streams and out to the sea. Sheet erosion, marked by shallow but numberless rills in our fields, is blotted out by each plowing. ...Here in a nutshell, so to speak, we have the underlying hazard of civilization. By clearing and cultivating sloping lands-- for most of our lands are more or less sloping-- we expose soils to accelerated erosion by water or by wind and sometimes by both water and wind. ...By doing this we enter upon a regime of self-destructive agriculture. The direful results of this suicidal agriculture have in the past been escaped by migration to new land. ...Escape to a new land is no longer a way out. We are brought face to face today with the necessity of finding out how to establish permanent agriculture on our farms under cultivation before they are damaged beyond reclamation, and before the food supply of a growing population becomes deficient.⁵

In the four decades since Lowdermilk's warning, little has been done to check soil erosion and establish a permanent agriculture... in the meantime world population continues to grow. "During the next twenty years our numbers (of human beings) will increase by at least one-third while the remaining soil resources will be diminished by one-third."⁶

Also in 1939, while the nation was temporarily

frightened by the great Dust Bowls, Hugh Hammond Bennett, chief of the Soil Conservation Service, stated that

in the short life of this country we have essentially destroyed 282,000,000 acres of land-crop and rangeland. Erosion is destructively active on 775,000,000 additional acres. About 100,000,000 acres of cropland, much of it representing the best cropland that we have, is finished in this country. We cannot restore... We are losing every day as the result of erosion the equivalent of two hundred forty-acre farms.⁷

In 1980, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chairperson of the Council on Environmental Quality jointly sponsored the NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LAND STUDY which published that the sheet and rill erosion rate for cropland in the United States over one year was 4.7 tons of topsoil per acre. With 413,000,000 acres in production, the total erosion of cropland topsoil in one year is 1,926,000,000 tons! When the erosion rates of rangeland, forestland, pastureland and cropland are added together, 3,871,000,000 tons of topsoil are lost each year.⁸ The picture is indeed bleak when one couples with erosion statistics the fact that as topsoil is lost the rate of erosion increases, the productivity level of the soil decreases, all at a time when world population and food demands are also on the increase.

It is clear that the human race is headed for catastrophe unless more stringent techniques to reduce soil degradation are employed. These techniques do exist. In some areas of China the same land has been farmed for thousands of years. Why is it that Western farming methods choose to destroy the soil and risk the future of the human

race when it does not have to be so?

Exaggeration doesn't help us understand the real problem of soil erosion. If erosion were threatening the survival of American agriculture within the next few years, we might be frightened enough to face the problem. We make the case that it is precisely because soil erosion in America is not an immediate threat to our food supply that it is a serious problem. Because it is invisible, because it is not accounted for in the price of food, because its impact takes centuries-- not decades-- to assess, soil erosion has ominous potential to destroy our agricultural land. Soil erosion's significance spans more than our lifetimes-- and we have no effective mechanism for addressing a problem of this nature."..."We must first assess the threat that soil erosion poses, grasp what is causing it, and uncover what-- in our economic ground rules and in our culture-- stands in the way of solving it.⁹

The contemporary notion, in this project labeled 'marginality', is graphically illustrated by modern civilization's relationship to the land. Even with a perspective of more than 7000 years of agriculture, a perspective that clearly shows that civilization lives only as long as the land, a perspective that identifies the self-destructive path humanity chooses to walk, a perspective that includes knowledge and methodologies capable of arresting civilization's suicidal spiral, even with this perspective, for modern humanity to grab for short-term gain and reward with certain risk to the land and to the future is one of several manifestations of 'marginality' in human land use. 'What-- in our economic ground rules and in our culture-- stands in the way of solving the problems of the certain destruction of the land, of human society, perhaps even the world?'... this project

suggests 'marginal' thinking.

This 'utilitarian' understanding of agricultural land, where the land's profit-making ability is valued over the land itself, is indeed a part of Western 'economic ground rules'. Where profit and economic growth are assigned top priority, exploitation will result. In this sense, soil destruction is a consequence of 'marginality'. But at the same time, the loss of the earth's precious soil for a few decades of prosperity demonstrates a fundamental disregard for the intrinsic value of the soil itself, a disregard for future generations who must depend on the same soil for food and demonstrates a basic belief in the fragmentation of reality.

If 'marginal' thinking is so destructive to the land and dangerous to the future of humanity why do people continue to accept the paradigm? In regards to agriculture, primarily because it is immediately profitable and benefits our life-style; secondarily is an underlying belief that somehow science will be able to bail us out of our 'natural dilemma' without us having to give up anything.

The problem of soil erosion in America does not result from inadequate government programs. Rather, soil conservation, as it is approached in the United States, is extraneous to the business of farming. The economic forces at work do not reward-- cannot reward-- soil conservation, at least in the short term. And the short term is the only time available to most farmers as they struggle to survive from year to year. In other words, just as the farm family has no way to pass on the rising costs of fuel or machinery, it cannot pass on the costs of terracing or contour plowing. As profits per acre steadily decline and real income is stagnant or falling,

these farmers are not likely to invest in conservation.¹⁰

Agricultural soil loss results when the custodians of the soil, the farmers, define the human/land relationship in 'marginal' terms. For the individual farmer to choose the destruction and loss of top soil because the cost of soil conservation cannot be passed on is a decision for immediate and short range profits at the cost of an impoverished future. This kind of 'marginal' thinking denies the natural world as a valuable part of God's creation and robs it of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will. Because of current resource exploitation, God's future children may starve. This form of 'marginality' promotes an understanding which views the land as nothing more than an instrument to be consumed by humanity in exchange for temporary economic gain.

To add to the problem of soil erosion in the United States is the fact that with rapid urbanization utilizing more and more prime cropland, land with thin or fragile topsoil is being opened up to cultivation. "The government estimates that 43% of land planted in row crops in the Corn Belt is highly susceptible to erosion."¹¹ Furthermore, three-fourths of the row crops planted were in corn and soybeans, both of which are rated among the highest for soil erosion. These crops are planted because they pay more than erosion reducing crops like hay, oats, barley and alfalfa.¹²

It is economically practical and expedient to think

in terms of immediate profits rather than long-range costs. Part of the difficulty of the agricultural soil depletion problem is that there is no way to evaluate the costs of soil degradation. In the North Central states where the topsoil is thick and soil erosion has little or no immediate effect on yields, how does one tally the costs? Furthermore, the immediate profits are great and the land still has a few good generations of yield capability left in it, why not 'make hay while the sun shines'? Economic growth at almost any cost to the bio-sphere is still the panacea of the Western mindset.

Herman Daly, as mentioned in Chapter I, maintains that the costs of growth in GNP outweighs the benefits when

the decreasing marginal benefit of extra GNP becomes less than the increasing marginal cost. The marginal benefit is measured by the market value of extra goods and services-- i.e., the increment of GNP itself in value units. But what statistical series measures the cost? Answer: none! That is growthmania; literally not counting the costs of growth.¹³

Our Western economy runs on oil. We need fossil fuels to run the technological machinery that has for so long put the United States in one of the captian's chairs of space-ship Earth. But we need more fossil fuels and mineral resources than the land of the U.S. can provide. Thus, by increasing our GNP through increased production of products like grain, the U.S. is able to trade for the fuel we need to keep our economic machinery running.

In attaining our high level of living in the U.S., we have used more minerals and mineral fuels during the

last 30 years than all the people of the world used previously. This enormous consumption will have to be doubled just to meet the needs of the people now living in the U.S. through the remainder of their lifetimes, say nothing of succeeding generations,...¹⁴

James Wessel and Mort Hantman call this economic phenomenon 'trading soil for oil'.¹⁵

Who is counting the costs of this 'growthmania'? "At current rates of soil erosion, we could lose every single acre of topsoil in America within a hundred years!"¹⁶ "Land after all is not an economic commodity. It is an integral part of the Nation even as its people are and requires protection by the individual owner and by the Nation as well."¹⁷ The appetite of our economy and life-style is greater than the capacity of the earth's pantry. Unless drastic changes are made, unless the 'growthmania' paradigm is checked, unless humanity ceases to think in the terms of 'marginality', generations already breathing today may find the world's cupboard bare. Living for today and not counting the costs to tomorrow is one of the most dangerous manifestations of 'marginality'.

The loss of the world's topsoil and the prediction that within a century the United States may not be able to grow food to feed even itself, is shocking and unbelievable. But the evidence is in. One only needs to look at the 'black' snow drifts along the ditches of Iowa roads during the winter months, or notice the brown crowns of Iowa's cultivated hills that twenty years ago were black with rich

prairie topsoil. If seeing is believing, then one needs only to look at the muddy waters of the Mississippi Delta to see America's future drifting out to sea. By averting its gaze and ignoring the record which 'is written on the land', humanity may buy a few more decades of prosperity and a future of impoverishment. Where is the growth in that?

The destruction of agricultural land is just one of the many ways that 'marginal' thinking threatens the environment. While starvation may be the plight of all humanity in one-hundred years (instead of only two-thirds of today's world population) even the most affluent contemporary societies suffer from the malignancy of environmental degradation caused by our modern life-styles. Our industrial system struggles to 'grow' amidst increasing shortages and expenses while the quality of life struggles simply to survive.

Environmental degradation is an iatrogenic disease induced by economic physicians who treat the basic malady of unlimited wants by prescribing unlimited economic growth. We experience environmental degradation in the form of increased scarcity of clean air, pure water, relaxed moments, etc.¹⁸

E.F. Schumacher writes that "Our problem is in the belief that science can do everything, and so you can go bull-headedly along, dumping poisons in ever-increasing quantities on this thin film around the globe, on which all life depends. If there are any unwanted side effects, science will deal with them."¹⁹ In the meantime, we breath toxic air, drink purified water, bury dangerous chemical

wastes in the land on which we live or drop them into the ocean on which life depends, all to support a life-style which will destroy irreplaceable resources and flare-out after a suicidal one-hundred year dash! "The cultural, ecological and human costs imposed on humanity by science and technology have thus far been enormous and, like the benefits, unevenly shared. There is something radically wrong with the way we are living on earth today."20

The rich world is tied to technology in the service of a concept of progress that rests on unlimited growth in the production and consumption of goods. ...Science and technology in the service of unlimited growth may, for a time, stave off disaster, but only by delivering us into a fool's paradise from which there may be no escape. The technological fix becomes the technological trap.21

...if Moses had foreseen what suicidal agriculture would do to the land of the holy earth-- might not have (he) been inspired to deliver another Commandment to establish man's relation to the earth and to complete man's trinity of responsibilities to his Creator, to his fellow men, and to the holy earth.22

Lowdermilk suggests this eleventh commandment:

Thou shalt inherit the Holy Earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living water from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hill from over-grazing by thy herd, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of thy earth.23

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the contemporary notion identified in this project as 'marginality' is clearly discernable in Western society's land and resource use patterns. In disregard of 10,000 years of civilization's history of destruction to agricultural soil, modern society seeks its visionless summum bonum of economic growth with little thought to the destruction of the natural resources which make civilization itself possible. As the agricultural land-base dwindles due to urbanization, pollution and erosion, the population of the world ever increases. At present rates, the topsoil in the United States may last only one-hundred years... and when it is gone there is no where else for humanity to go: no new continents to exploit. In pursuit of economic growth, Western society continues its self-regarding consumption of virtually irreplaceable resources at an ever increasing rate. In a very real sense, for immediate gratification and immanent gain, Western civilization is, piece by piece, trading the birth-right of all humanity and of all creation. Living for today's gain with little or no thought to the inheritance of future generations, with little thought to the anthropocentric construct of the human value hierarchy, is the indictment of 'marginality'.

Underlying and intensifying this 'utilitarian',

profit-motivated understanding of resources is the wider, philosophical/theological notion of 'marginality' which conceives the created world as being fragmented. Where reality is viewed as fragmented, there can be no integrity: no relationship of interrelatedness or interdependence between the different objects of the created world and between creation and God. Western civilization's 'marginal' conceptualization of the natural world denies its intrinsic value as a part of God's creation and its significance in the evolution of God's will. And perhaps most important of all, 'marginality's' fragmentation denies that God has a will for creation and that God is in relationship with all aspects of the created world.

Endnotes

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- 2 W. C. Lowdermilk. "The Conquest of the Land Through Seven Thousand Years" (Washington: Soil Conservation Service, 1939)
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- 5 Ibid.
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- 7 National Agricultural Land Study (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980) III, 20.
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- 10 Ibid., 43.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Herman E. Daly, Toward A Steady-State Economy (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983) 150.
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- 19 E. F. Schumacher, Good Work (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) as cited by Freudenberger, 28.

20 Charles Birch, "Creation, Technology and Human Survival. Called to Replenish the Earth." Address to the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, Kenya. Document no. A1 (December 1, 1975) i.

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CHAPTER III

MARGINALITY: THE PRODUCT OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND BIASED
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In the last chapter, the human/land relationship was examined as an illustration of the functioning of the contemporary notion of 'marginality' in land and land use patterns. The far-reaching ramifications of current resource use practices predict such a bleak and degraded future that many people may disregard the warning cries of a few as exaggerated and alarmist. But the threat is real. Charles Birch equated the world with the Titanic, headed on a collision course with the fatal iceberg. The visible parts of the iceberg are "the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources, pollution and the consequent deterioration of the quality of life."¹ The huge underlying parts of the iceberg hidden below the surface are "the social, political and economic structures and the spiritual confusion as to goals in life."² Thus far, this project has identified some of the more obvious visible aspects of the "iceberg"; the physical symptoms of a much larger, deeper syndrome. To think that humanity with its technology can adequately solve the symptoms of 'the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources, pollution and the consequent deterioration of the

quality of life' without first solving the larger formative problems of 'the social, political and economic structures and the spiritual confusion as to goals in life' is the same as to say that a bandage will somehow cure lymphatic cancer.

To act as if the cure for all the ills of technology is more of the same technology is to follow the pied pipers of technology to destruction. I have two reasons for saying this. Firstly, science and technology will not always be able to pull a technological rabbit out of the hat to save us in the last minute. To pin one's ultimate faith on science and technology to provide for the future is cargo-cult thinking. Food, energy and other resources from magical providers may never arrive. Secondly, technological rabbits of the modern kind tend to create more problems than they solve. They usually have voracious appetites and copious noxious excretions.³

The fact of the matter is that time is running short. If this world is to survive, human beings dare not treat only symptoms but causes as well. This means that humanity must deal with the destruction of the bio-sphere, must alter its spiritually bankrupt attitudes towards the natural world and redefine its understanding of the meaning of the word 'dominion'. "I cannot see that there will be any fundamental reshaping of technology and society without a basic change of heart and mind about man's relationship to nature. 'We are suffering' said Ernest Schumacher 'from a metaphysical, not just a technical deficiency.' Total spiritual confusion prevails in the modern world about the relationship of man to nature in a technological culture."⁴

H. Skolimowshi writes:

we are a schizophrenic civilization which deludes itself that it is the greatest that has ever existed, while its people are walking embodiments of misery and anxiety. Our knowledge and philosophy only widen the rift between living and thinking. T.S. Eliot's prophetic cry: 'Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in information?' rings today truer than ever. [He goes on to say that it is our linear, atomistic and deterministic thinking]... that chops everything into small bits and subsequently forces the variety of life into abstract pigeon-holes of physical knowledge which I consider diseased, for in the final reckoning it produces diseased consequences. Therefore, when I say that in devising new tactics for living we shall need to rethink our relationships with the world at large, I mean expressly that we shall need to abandon the mechanistic conception of the world, and replace it with a much broader and richer one.⁵

Charles Birch put it this way:

There is a connection between our image of nature and the way we manipulate nature. The ideology of nature dominant in western Christianity is the same one that is dominant in the secular world. It is a technocratic view of nature. As a scientist I say it is bad science. As a non-theologian looking in from the outside I am bold enough to say it looks like bad theology also. People cry for bread and we give them a stone. The technocratic view of nature is a clockwork model of nature. Not only is it inadequate. It is pernicious because it reinforces the pattern of mind and behavior of a manipulative society. In this technocratic view the non-human creation is no more than the stage on which the drama of human life is performed. Plants and animals are there solely for us to use. They are the props. In ethical terms they are only of instrumental value to us. This attitude to the created order is totally egotistic. It is arrogant. It is a form of chauvinism. It sets the stage for insensitivity to what man is doing to the environment, even though it carry the tamely interpreted rider that we are to be stewards in our dominion over nature. It draws the support from a misinterpreted science and from a particular view of biblical theology. ⁶

The contemporary notion termed 'marginality' by this project is clearly observed in the rift in the relationships

of the human being, i.e., in the human/land relationship, in the human/animal relationship, in the human/human relationship, and in the human/Creator relationship. "There is a connection between human justice and renewal of earth and between human injustice and environmental deterioration. When people no longer care about people they no longer care about the world."7 And when people no longer care about the world, they no longer care about God.

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is not faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; and even the fish of the sea are taken away. (Hosea 4:1-3, New Oxford R.S.V.)

THE BIBLE

It is instructive to look briefly at some of the roots of 'marginality' in aspects of western culture which have been formative in modern society's 'instrumental' view of creation which has in turn resulted in humanity's broken relationship with the created order.

In any tally of factors which have been influential in western culture's view of the created order, certainly the Bible would rank near the top. For the purposes of this project, a brief look at aspects of the creation story in Genesis 1 may prove particularly helpful;

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26-29, New Oxford R.S.V.)

From even a cursory look at this Genesis passage out of the context of prior verses, there is high potential for understanding the Bible as an advocate of the consumptive life-style which now threatens us. Not only does the passage clearly stratify the created order with humanity at the top, but the creation called human is in the likeness of God, modeled after the image of God. Furthermore, human beings have been instructed by God, the Creator, to populate the earth, conquer it and to rule over it. From the appearance of things we have pretty much complied with God's will. We have populated to the point that two-thirds of the world's population is undernourished, we have conquered and ruled to the extent that the land is nearly dead, many natural resources are in scarcity and hundreds of species of plant and animal life are extinct. We have carried out God's directives with a vengeance!

It is no great surprise that at a time when the world seemed limitless and unconquerable, when new frontiers were over every horizon and humanity was literally stumbling over itself in its evolution of culture, science and technology,

that Genesis 1:26-29 should be liberally interpreted as a divine 'go for it'. The following is an excerpt from J.G. Murphy, circa 1866.

...the new being (the human being) in its higher nature is associated not so much with any part of creation as with the Eternal Uncreated himself. ...The relation of man to the creature is now stated. It is that of sovereignty. Those capacities of right thinking, right willing, and right acting, or of knowledge, holiness, and righteousness, in which man resembles God, qualify him for dominion, and constitute him lord of all creatures that are destitute of intellectual and moral endowments. Hence, wherever man enters he makes his sway to be felt.

This is the meet sequel of his being created in the image of God. Being formed for dominion, the earth and its various products and inhabitants are assigned to him for the display of his powers. The subduing and ruling refer not to the mere supply of his natural wants, for which provision is made in the following verse, but to the accomplishment of his various purposes of science and beneficence, whether towards the inferior animals or his own race.⁸

While human nature has seldom been portrayed as 'divine' even by the most zealous of biblical scholars, the *imago dei* and the elevated stature of the human being over the remainder of creation has led to some speculation as to the divine nature of human motivation and accomplishments. For example, in 1873, the Rt. Rev E. Harold Browne, Lord Bishop of Ely wrote:

The brute creatures are gifted with life and will and self-consciousness, and even with some powers of reason: but they have no self-determining will, no choice between good and evil, no power of self-education, no proper moral character, and so no true personality. God is the essentially personal Being, and in giving to man an immortal soul, He gave him also a true personality, self-consciousness, power of free choice, and of distinct moral responsibility. All this was accompanied at first with perfect purity and innocence; and thus man

was like his Maker, intelligent, immortal, personal, with powers of forethought and free choice, and at the same time pure, holy and undefiled.⁹

While biblical scholars have been very careful to state that human beings are not gods, a great deal of verbage has been spilled in attempts to show the dis-similarities between humanity and the rest of creation... with humanity leaning a little closer to God than to creation. "The 'man' is not strength, or grace, or piercing sight; but a mind thinking God's thoughts, and in communion with Him."¹⁰ "...he finds himself to be constituted lord of the earth, next in rank under the Creator of all, formed in the image of his Maker, and therefore capable not only of studying the works of nature, but contemplating and reverently communing with the Author of nature."¹¹ "... at length the man is seen, the 'image of God', to crown and perfect all. What is this image? This image is the mind of God in us."¹²

Certainly these scholars were not for a minute attempting to persuade the reader that the human being is divine. The 'Fall' in chapter 2 of Genesis would quickly squelch that misconception. But the thought does occur, that perhaps they 'protest too much', meaning that the sheer mass of the rhetoric devoted to the *imago dei*, showing the human akin to God and at the same time emphasizing the rift between the human creature and the rest of the created world, tends to infer human aspirations of divinity.

Gerhard Von Rad in his discussion of Genesis 1 devotes almost no time to the possibility of the divinity of the human being. "God created, God spoke, God separated, God made, God blessed;" that is all there is to it. Of the creation, humanity has the closest relationship to God, but we are first and last, creatures; no more.¹³

Is it possible that even in our understanding of Genesis 1, humanity has, perhaps unintentionally, tended to concentrate on its proximity to God at great expense to our relationship to the rest of nature? And would it be totally inappropriate to call some of the marvelous works and accomplishments of the human race a modern, technological 'tower of Babel'? This is not to suggest that technology is intrinsically evil; far from it. But technology does have great potential for both good and evil. When the natural world is viewed as fragmented, as merely a stage upon which the drama of human history is acted out, that all of creation is but an instrument to be used without counting the costs, then humanity does not view itself to be a part of this world, (or the world to be a part of humanity) but of some higher order. The carrier of the proof of humanity's 'otherness', that which allows the human creature to think of itself as a 'thou' has been our capacity for technology... for good or ill.

The term 'dominion' is also worthy of examination. In glancing through commentaries and other resources, one is

struck by the lack of attention paid to the word 'dominion'. While the term implies 'mastery', other ancient definitions of the word vary from 'to have power over', to 'rule', to 'trample'.¹⁴ The spectrum of meanings between 'to have power over' and to 'trample' is vast. It would seem that essential to locating humanity's relationship to nature from the Genesis account, one would first need to understand whether to have 'dominion' over nature is to 'rule' it; i.e. to 'govern' according to our 'partnership' with God, or to 'trample' it. While there seems to be little question in the minds of the traditional biblical scholars read for this project that 'dominion' means to 'rule' rather than to 'trample', there seems to be some confusion on the part of culture as to the difference between 'ruling' and 'trampling'. A brief look at the landscape around Anaconda or Butte, Montana leaves no doubt as to which definition of 'dominion' has been put into practice there. But to 'rule' over nature is not to be separate from it.

This freedom of dominion directly includes our tie to the creatures who are ruled. The soil and the animals whose Lord I am are the world in which I live, without which I am not. It is my world, my earth, over which I rule. I am not free from it in the sense that my real being, my spirit requires nothing of nature, foreign to the spirit though it may be. On the contrary, in my total being, in my creatureliness, I belong to this world completely. It bears me, nourishes me, and holds me. But my freedom from it consists in the fact that this world, to which I am bound as a lord to his servant, as the peasant to his soil, is subjected to me, that I am to rule over the earth which is and remains my earth, and the more strongly I rule it the more it is my earth. It is by no other commissioned authority except that given by the Word of God to man-- which thus

uniquely binds and sets him over and against the other creatures.¹⁵

It is an odd kind of relationship, this dominion. Humanity is totally dependant upon the earth at the same time the earth is radically subjected to humanity. Unlike the tyrannosaurus who ruled over nearly all life forms during its reign, yet was subject to nature itself, humanity subjects not only the living, but inanimate objects as well. Our presence on earth is affecting landscape, climate and the entire bio-sphere. Indeed we do have power over creation... but we are bound to nature as well. As our planet becomes toxic, our soil depleted and our very existence threatened, humanity is just beginning to realize how closely bound we are to the nature we 'rule'.

We do not rule, we are ruled. The thing, the world, rules man. Man is a prisoner, a slave of the world, and his rule is illusion. Technology is the power with which the earth grips man and subdues him. And because we rule no more, we lose the ground, and then the earth is no longer our earth, and then we become strangers on earth. We do not rule because we do not know the world as God's creation, and because we do not receive our dominion as God-given but grasp it for ourselves. There is not 'being-free-from' without 'being-free-for'. There is no dominion without serving God.¹⁶

'Marginality' denies the natural world as a manifestation of God's creation by treating it as of only instrumental worth: a tool or a toy for human use. Yet as the wastes humanity has spewed into the environment begin to poison human communities and shortages from exploited natural resources begin to leave human needs wanting; the fragmented understanding of reality set forth in 'marginal' thinking is

called into question. By robbing the natural world of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will, 'marginal' thinking has kept humanity from considering the well-being and continuance of creation even to the extent of blinding humanity from seeing the need to plan for the well-being and continuance of the human race.

THE BIBLE AND CHRISTIANITY

As mentioned in chapter one, Lynn White Jr. identifies Christianity's victory over paganism as one of the major 'pshycic revolutions' in the history of culture. He maintains that modern culture's faith in 'perpetual progress' is rooted in 'Judeo-Christian teleology'.

...Christianity inherited from Judiasm not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image.

Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.¹⁷

White goes on to point out that in pagan animism, every aspect of nature had its guardian spirit, a genius loci.

Early Christianity, with its radical monotheism set out to destroy animism. In so doing, "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." Once humanity had a "monopoly on the spirit in this world"... "old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled"¹⁸, leaving the door wide-open for western culture, science and technology to view nature as of only instrumental value.

I personally doubt that disastrous ecologic backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science and more technology. Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim. The newly elected Governor of California (1967) like myself a churchman but less troubled than I, spoke for the Christian tradition when he said (as is alleged), "when you've seen one red-wood tree, you've seen them all." To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly two millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.¹⁹

Attempts have been made by some Christians to 'rethink' the Christian faith as a corrective to the human/nature relationship. People like St. Francis of Assisi and Albert Schweitzer have asserted a new ethic of responsibility for

all life. 'Marginal' thinking in its human-centeredness, denies the natural world as a manifestation of God's will, thereby trivializing human responsibility for anything but immediate human wants. 'Marginality's' avoidance of an ethic of responsibility is destructive to the created world and thus robs it of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will.

ANTHROPOCENTRIC THOUGHTS

In the previous section, White criticizes Christianity for despiritualizing nature, thereby subjecting nature to exploitation by serving only human needs. In a sense, White accuses Christianity for being anthropocentric.

W.H. Murdy takes the anthropocentric notion a little farther. He states that in 'pre-Darwinian anthropocentrism', nature was viewed as being created solely for human benefit.²⁰ 'Darwinian anthropocentrism', on the other hand, asserted that "natural selection cannot possibly produce any modification in a species exclusively for the good of another species...Species exist as ends in themselves...The purpose of a species, in biological terms is to survive to reproduce."²¹ Murdy suggests that "To be anthropocentric is to affirm that mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature-- by man. ...It is proper for men to be anthropocentric and for spiders to be

arachnocratic. This goes for all other living species."22 But Murdy goes on to say that basic to a sound concept of anthropocentrism is an acknowledgement that the individual's well-being is dependant upon the well-being of the individual's social structure and the individual's ecological support system. So, to be anthropocentric is essential to the survival of the human species, but essential to the survival of the human species is the health of the social and environmental environment upon which the human species is dependent.

Every living thing is a sort of imperialist, seeking to transform as much as possible of its environment into itself and its seed.' Man's unprecedented power to exploit nature has been used in part to improve the quality of human life, but also in part to transform as much as possible of the environment into ever more human beings. The latter process in our time threatens to undermine the former.

The maximization of reproductive potential is, from a biological point of view, in the best interest of most species. This was true for man throughout most of his history. In a world with small human populations at the mercy of environmental vicissitudes, with vast areas of unoccupied space and great stores of untapped resources, the biblical injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth" had adaptive value and was in the species' best interest, but in the modern world such an injunction is an anachronism.

...The production of ever more human biomass at the expense of ever greater environmental degradation is anti-anthropocentric in that it is maladaptive for the species.23

Murdy points out that what makes human beings unique of the created order is the fact that they are able to determine that they are unique. Our culture passes on the accumulated knowledge of centuries. This knowledge gives humanity great power over our environment, which in the past

has made humanity an incredible biological success, but more recently threatens the very existence of the human creature and the world. What Murdy fears is that humanity, by deteriorating the environment, may lose the cultural values and power that make homo sapiens uniquely human. Indeed, it is anthropocentric to value those factors that make humans unique in the created order, and to "seek to preserve and enhance such factors and to counter antihuman forces which threaten to diminish or destroy them. Nature outside of man will not act to preserve human values; it is our responsibility alone."²⁴

Murdy values our anthropocentrism. It is precisely because humanity is anthropocentric that he finds hope for a change in our approach to nature and our impact on the bio-sphere. Looking out for our own best interest involves looking out for the best interest of the bio-sphere that supports us. Part of the knowledge and power that makes humanity unique is the ability to look into the past and the future, project goals and work to realize these goals. The evolution of humanity involves the ability of human beings to relate to, adapt to, and alter environments in purposeful, creative and sustainable ways.

An anthropocentric faith in mankind affirms that we are not isolated monads acting out absurd roles within a meaningless context, but that we are essential elements of a meaningful whole and that our individual acts are vitally significant to the self-actualization of the process of human evolution itself and to the enhancement of value in the world.²⁵

In the long run, as the human impact on the bio-sphere surpasses the carrying capacity of planet earth, humanity is clearly faced with the fact that it can no longer consider human objectives apart from the context of the natural world. More and more humans find that there is little in the world that is valueless either intrinsically, or in its relationship to the well-being of humanity. 'Marginality', in the way it has been defined in this project, is the fallacious notion that natural resources on the 'fringes' of human economic usefulness and profit-earning ability are also of little or no intrinsic value. It is basic to the continued existence of life on this planet, that thinking in terms of the notion of 'marginality' be replaced with a spirituality and responsiveness which acknowledges all aspects of creation as intrinsically precious.

"THE JONAH COMPLEX REVISITED"

Pierre-E. Lacocque takes a second look at the psychological causes behind an individual's tendency to run from social responsibilities and personal growth. Lacocque was puzzled as to why people generally choose conformity and the trivial in life rather than opting for the respect and preservation of all that lives; i.e., why "one blindly accepts the norms of the group without assessing their

ethical implications for personal and collective growth."²⁶ That people tend to flee responsibility and its implications is a well known psychological fact. Lacocque credits Maslow with integrating the phenomenon into a theory. Maslow "called this defense mechanism 'fear of standing alone', 'fear of one's greatness', 'evasion of one's destiny', or 'fear of knowledge' until he adopted the term 'Jonah Syndrome'".²⁷ Maslow explained:

The Jonah syndrome is a falling short of what one could have been, and even one could say, of what one should have been... We all have unused potentialities or not fully developed ones... We enjoy and even thrill to the God-like possibilities we see in ourselves in our most perfect moments. And yet we simultaneously shiver with weakness, awe, and fear before those very same possibilities...²⁸

Maslow went on to say that what people fear most is change, change requires risk. It is better to remain faceless in the mass of humanity than to discover something new about ourselves that might make us rethink the values and meanings of our lives.

Maslow's 'self-actualization' theory includes the well-known 'human need hierarchy' which basically states that the most fundamental needs of the human are physiological, e.g. food, shelter, etc.. After these needs are met, other needs come into play, such as safety needs, personal concept needs and finally self-actualizing needs, in that order. "Once physiological needs are met, other needs emerge and dominate the organism." "Self-actualization or the fulfillment of all these needs is what Maslow considers the healthiest response to life.

Self-actualization for him means 'doing the best with one's capacities as the world permits', or the 'full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities'."29 In light of this 'need hierarchy', Maslow suggested that the Jonah syndrome, or running away from the personal growth of self-actualization, is out of the fear of leaving the realm of the safe and known.

If there is any validity to Maslow's 'need hierarchy', then it is not difficult to see why the world is faced with its present ecological dilemma. If all of humanity's physiological, safety and esteem needs must be met before it can begin to be 'self-actualized', (or 'doing the best with one's capacities as the world permits') then the world is in a bad way. Two-thirds of the world's population are under-nourished, the only thing worthy of their attention is where to get a mouthful of food. The other third of the human race is constantly afraid of leaving the 'safety zone' for fear of losing what it already has. Furthermore, of those who can afford to be 'self-actualized', the majority are about 'doing their best to the limits of the world's capacities' to be sure that they will never be short on their basic needs. Of the people on this earth today, how many who have a choice are willing to live 'hand to mouth' so that a few more may have something to put into their mouths? Indeed the Jonah syndrome is alive and well.

Lacocque suggests that instead of simply listening to the 'inner voice' of Maslow's self-actualized theory which only speaks of our own biological needs and personal growth, the self-actualized person needs to be authentic to an 'outer voice'. "Growth demands that we break the monologue with ourselves and acknowledge a greater external reality asking us to transform our narcissistic preoccupations into love, humility, and reverence for life."³⁰

There are numerous outer voices enticing us with all kinds of rewards and successes. That is precisely where they reveal their falseness, for they are nothing but inner voices in disguise. They flatter our egos; they do not point to higher achievements worthy of our efforts and even sacrifices, but direct us to only adorned mirrors where we can complacently and narcissistically admire our selves. The outer voice of Hitler's hearing was only the demonic whispering that his mania was sacred rage, that his megalomania was divine appointment. Ultimately this spurious outer voice makes one run in circles. The encounter is never with the Other, with God, but with the most terrible idol of all: The isolated self. There are indeed numerous outer voices rooted in pathogenic realms.

Strictly speaking, however, there is only one Voice which comes from without. He does not flatter; He does not make complacent; He does not promise success or happiness, but hardship (cf. Joshua 24, Genesis 22, the Cross, and in Jonah's task) He commands and commissions and breaks all selfish circles.³¹

Lacocque states clearly what we all know and fear. Enthusiastically being 'for-the-world' goes against all our self-protective instincts. Unless our most basic needs are met, we face death, the ultimate fear. Being-for-the-world means risking our most fundamental needs. For fear of the risk involved, the few who 'have' are reluctant to share with the many who 'have not'.

It is indeed less threatening to deny suffering in the world, to root for a favorite sports team, or to idealize a movie star than to be actively committed to improve the human condition.

The Jonah complex is a rejection of our God-like potentialities (e.g. our unique capacity for concern, charity, and empathy) It is a pathological ambivalence before our real and authentic greatness, a greatness we have inherited like life itself and for which we must give account. We fear becoming beings-for-the-world, because of the over-whelming demands associated with the choice it implies.³²

SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to uncover some of the root causes of the notion labeled in this project as 'marginality' and to do this has; looked at some of the confusing aspects found in the creation account in Genesis 1; reviewed some of the contributions made to the notion by the Christian tradition which despiritualized the natural world; considered the effects of anthropocentric thinking in how humanity has viewed itself in the past, views itself now and how these views affect the future of the bio-sphere; and has examined Maslow's 'need hierarchy' and the 'Jonah Complex' to give some psychological perspective into humanity's avoidance of social responsibilities.

We, the human creature are a rather odd bundle of goods. We are quick to claim a special, elevated and self-serving stature over the natural world and in many cases even over our own kind. We are quick to sing the

praises of our technological prowess and skills at great cost to the environment. We have power enough to destroy everything that lives on the face of the earth, and yet are not strong enough to face the fact that we are, after all, creatures. That we are dependant on the very world we hold so mightly in our hand. With all our blustery dominion, we are embarassed to face the realization, the authentic "outer call", that our life and the life of the world depends on the sovereign human falling to her and his knees in the gasping soil of our earth, and as one of the created, nurturing nature back to life.

Western thought patterns are so heavily laced with 'marginality' and our culture so dependant on a 'marginal', fragmented exploitation of the natural world, that to replace 'marginal' thinking with a spirituality viewing all aspects of creation as intrinsically precious calls for a total revamping of human value constructs. When humans recognize in the created world the spirit and intentionality of the Creator and can hear the authentic "outer-call" of responsible relationship to the world, only then does planet Earth have a possibility for a preferred future.

Endnotes

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- 9 Harold E. Browne, Genesis; Or the First Book of Moses (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1873) 35-36.
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CHAPTER IV

CREATION AND DOMINION: A MATTER FOR HUMAN TRANSCENDANCE

In the first chapter, the term 'marginality' was introduced. In the ensuing chapters, 'marginality' has been continually referred to in ever expanding contexts. At this point it may be useful to review the idea of 'marginality' as it has been discussed in this project. Webster's Dictionary lists as one of the definitions of 'marginal'; "...of or pertaining to a limit of change in economic conditions determining the point at which any given process, action or the like, will cease to be or act." For the purposes of this project, the definition of 'marginality' is also used in an ecological sense. The important point to be made is that 'marginality' is a mind-set. It is the fallacious notion that natural resources on the 'fringes' of human economic usefulness and profit-earning ability are also of little or no intrinsic value. Further, the notion of 'marginality' denies the natural world as a manifestation of God's creation and robs it of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will.

Earlier, this project attempted to demonstrate how the majority of human cultivation, in it's seven to ten-thousand years of agriculture, has been destructive to the land. History has shown that while civilization is

utterly dependant upon the soil's ability to provide food, the effect of civilization upon the land has been to turn rich, healthy landscapes into deserts. In the past, the transformation of fertile land into deserts has been due to human ignorance, neglect and to the belief that the frontiers of untouched earth were limitless. Today, however, humanity knows full well that there is a limit to the earth's bounty. Furthermore, while modern farming techniques which preserve and renew the soil and its crop-bearing abilities do exist, western farming practices tend to exploit the land. Modern land management short-sightedly grasps for a few decades of phenomenal out-put at the cost of an impoverished future. This 'trade the future for today's temporary gain' is thinking in terms of 'marginality'. It sees the land itself as having little or no intrinsic value since short-term economic gain is valued over the land itself. The land has value only in that, for a few years, it can turn soil into cash. This utilitarian understanding of the natural world which results in 'trading the future for today's temporary gain' is a manifestation of 'marginality' in that it values today's generation over tomorrow's. The future is discounted. The children of tomorrow's generation will not be fed unless something immediate is done to curb our present over-consumption of the earth's limited resources.

Not only is the modern world's arable land base being

eroded away by short-horizon agricultural techniques, but modern technology flourishes at great cost to the entire bio-sphere. Toxic wastes foul our land, water and atmosphere. Poisons are continually dumped into an already over-taxed eco-system, strangling all forms of life including humans. The economic gain of our technology for a few today, is often at the cost of the future through resource depletion and the destruction of life itself. This 'spending-spree' of today by a few, without counting the costs to tomorrow for the many, is thinking in terms of 'marginality'.

The effects of 'marginal' thinking are not reserved for future generations alone, although they will undoubtedly suffer the most from today's extravagance. But as the ramifications of 'marginal' living encounter the limits of this tiny planet's carrying capacity, all of humanity experiences the compression of consumption and exploitation. Even those who profit most from 'marginal' life styles, while insulated from poisons in the environment and starvation, cannot escape the impoverishment of living at the expense of all others. This impoverishment is relatively painless in comparison to the agony of starvation, but its toll is severe; severe enough to make the very richest afraid to look at the world honestly and responsibly. The few who live at the expense of the many must deny that which makes human beings unique of all

creation, i.e. they must deny their humanity itself for a wealth that never satisfies.

'Marginal' thinking not only exploits the land, its resources and the majority of life on the planet, but the backlash of 'marginal' thinking exploits the promoters of 'marginal' thought as well. 'Marginality' costs more economically, bio-spherically, sociologically and spiritually than it repays. Yet, 'marginal' thinking prevails in Western political, technological and cultural thinking. 'Developing' countries look to the West as a model to emulate, as if Western technology, economics and political notions are some kind of paradise. But most of these paradises are illusory.

A technological society of some form or other is here to stay. I only hope and pray that it will not be the sort of technological society most of the countries of the world are so madly striving to create. If the life of the world is to be sustained and renewed, as directed in Genesis, it will have to be with a new sort of science and technology governed by a new sort of economics and politics. That is what the sustainable global society is all about.

If we could only see ourselves in a global perspective then I believe we would come to see that ultimately the sustainable global society has the following requirements. Population growth would cease at or below the carrying capacity of the earth: zero population growth. Consumption of resources will stabilize at a sustainable level of supply- zero growth in consumable goods. Resources will be distributed to where they are most needed. They will be "farmed" by recycling as much as possible, involving a new sort of technology. The emission of pollutants will be kept below the capacity of the earth to absorb them- zero growth in pollution. In the sustainable society the emphasis will be on people, not on goods, on growth in quality not on growth in quantity.¹

Unfortunately, our present society is a long ways

from a sustainable society with zero-growth in economics, population, consumption of resources and pollution. Yet a sustainable society must evolve if the world is to survive. Until 'marginal' thinking is replaced with a spirituality that understands the integrity of reality and holds all life, present and future, as intrinsically precious, a sustainable future is not possible. To loosen 'marginalism's' strangling grip on modern Western cultural conceptualizations requires a rethinking of the constructs of the Western value hierarchy as well as replacing the Western fragmented world view with one which acknowledges the integrity of reality. To this end, it may be beneficial to examine the creation narrative found in Genesis 1.

James Sanders shows that Genesis 1 is "an apologetic in liturgical form with satirical overtones" written to arrest Israel's temptation to worship the gods of her Babylonian captors.² The Israelites in exile needed theogony to keep their faith intact, so the priests responded by writing a liturgy of creation.

The overarching statement of Genesis 1-11 is that God is God and creation is creation, and they must never be confused. God is Creator, and all else is creation. They are utterly different categories of being. God is not trapped in his creation, nor does creation harbor some bit of divinity. Nothing in creation is God, and nothing of God is created. Genesis 1 and 2 make it abundantly clear that God is the subject of the verbs of creation, and all else is the object. God alone is not created: all else is created.

Genesis 3-11 go on carefully to state that while God is God, man is man, and the two must never be confused. Man is created; God is creator. Man is mortal; God is immortal. ...Immortality is not the

only distinction between God and man, but in Genesis 3-11 it is the principle vehicle for stating the distinction.³

According to Sanders, the Old Testament message in Genesis states loudly and clearly that God is God and humans are creation. But what about humanity's 'image of God' and our 'dominion' written in Genesis 1?

In what does the imago dei consist? The text is about as clear as it can be. To be in the image of God is to reflect his dominion or mastership. How absurd that man should worship nature deities as all Israel's neighbors did. Far from worshipping such nature deities, man is commanded by the one true God to have dominion over all the rest of creation- to subdue it, to have it for food. Nothing in creation should command man's fear: only God can do that, only God should be worshipped.⁴

Genesis 1 was not written to show humanity's nearness to divinity, but to state in clear terms that God is God. This radical monotheism is also verified in Von Rad's statement, quoted earlier, that Genesis 1 speaks with highest concentration about God, "God created, God spoke, God separated, God made, God blessed."⁵ God and God alone is the subject of the Genesis text.

Rolf Knierim, in his essay, "The Task Of Old Testament Theology", explains that while no one theology is consistantly expressed in the Old Testament, it is possible to identify the priorities established in the many theologies. It is Knierim's position that

the ultimate concern discernible in the Old Testament and, hence, the ultimate vantage point from which to coordinate its theologies gravitates around the universal dominion of Yahweh in justice and righteousness. This dominion is expressed time and again directly in the categories of cosmic nature, of

human history and existence, and most fundamentally in the theology of creation.⁶

To view the theology of Genesis 1 as God-centered rather than human-centered and to understand that the primary theological concern of P, the author of the creation account, was to express 'God's universal dominion in justice and righteousness', sheds fresh light on how to view the biblical directives giving humanity dominion over creation. 'Universal dominion' belongs to God and God alone, but humans, created in the image of God, are given a share in God's sovereignty.⁷ Human 'dominion', as P uses the term in Genesis 1:26,28 is an expression drawn from "royal terminology, which includes a massive realization of (God's) will."⁸

... the Creator needs a governor on earth, who acts according to his intention, i.e. according to the intention behind the world of creation set up by God. According to P, "acting" here also means, in the context of the dwelling-together of living things, the continual establishment and enforcement of order. But here as elsewhere, order is for P not a rule that implies determination by some outside force- something that diminishes life, or even reduces living things to slavery. It is the framework in which individual life develops, but is also restricted for its own good and continuance, as well as for the good and continuance of the whole.⁹

God has established the framework of rule for the well-being of all creation and the task of human dominion is to implement God's rule.¹⁰ "For P (human dominion) is a matter of vocation, which is necessary for the successful continuance of the created world."¹¹

The limitations laid down in Genesis 1 show that for P

the possibility of an exploitation of the earth to the point of the exhaustion of its resources, or the contingency that autocratic man might poison and destroy living space on earth, is not remotely considered in this authorization.¹²

Similarly, the subjection of the earth, to 'subdue' it, means that humanity is entrusted with the ability to till the soil for food and the growing of plants necessary to provide for human life.¹³

The interconnections between living things and their habitats, between animals and their food, between man and beast, and between man and the earth, all take their course by way of God, as processes relevant to life; and they need express regulation and empowerment through the action and word of the One who created the world as a whole destined for life.¹⁴

This relationship of interconnectedness between all of creation, expressed in Genesis 1, has for decades been ignored or discounted by modern Western scientific and technological methods and the earth's present ecological crisis is the result. The West has developed an essentially fragmented view of reality which has made it possible to view humans as somehow separate from the rest of creation. This fragmentation has allowed humanity to view the natural world as expendable; i.e., possessing little or no intrinsic value. Because of today's fragmented view of reality, the message of Genesis 1 is of vital importance. P tells us that reality is not fragmented, but that reality has integrity: God is the subject of Genesis; it is God who has 'universal dominion in justice and righteousness'; it is God who gave design and form to creation that all life

may have continuance; and it is God who gave to humanity the *imago dei* and the appointment to "act as God's steward in the world, which God created for permanence."¹⁵ The integrity of reality is God. Neither birds, trees nor human beings are gods, only God is God. That God created the cosmos and provided means by which all life may have continuance, even to the extent of appointing humans to be governors to assure continuance, gives all of creation intrinsic value and significance, i.e., integrity. If our world-view continues to be fragmented, there is little chance that our world can survive. If, on the other hand, our world-view were to come to understand the integrity of reality as it is revealed in the Old Testament, then humanity would respond to all of creation in a relationship of responsibility for the earth, its resources and life-forms. A world-view which understands the integrity of reality would be one which insures the continuance of all life.

A fragmented view of reality is an expression of 'marginality'; i.e., the fallacious notion that natural resources and life-forms on the 'fringes' of human economic usefulness and profit-earning ability are also of little or no intrinsic value. Further, the notion of 'marginality' denies the natural world as a manifestation of God's creation and robs it of its creative spirit and purpose in the evolution of God's will. However a perspective that

acknowledges the the integrity of reality as expressed in the theology of the Old Testament could replace the notion of 'marginality' with a spirituality which views all creation as intrinsically precious, manifesting God's creative spirit and purpose.

Only when humanity recognizes itself as a part of creation with a responsibility for the continuance of all life on the planet, will humanity also see the uniqueness of the human creature. P, the author of Genesis, saw this uniqueness to be God's divine appointment of humanity to have dominion over creation, and to become the "guarantor of the order of the whole, which gives continuance to life."¹⁶ Murdy expressed this uniqueness in Chapter Three, as culture... a way 'of acquiring, storing, and transmitting knowledge about the world'.¹⁷ This 'knowledge' also gives the human being the ability to review human history, objectively evaluate the present and to even chart goals and aspirations for the future. This 'knowledge' allows a perspective no other creature (as far as we know) possesses; the possibility of humanity to view its position within the historical context.

Thus far, human culture and knowledge transmitted from generation to generation has provided humanity "with ever-increasing power to exploit nature and, as a result, (human beings) have become a great biological success."¹⁸ Our accumulated knowledge has been placed mercilessly in

service to the satisfaction of humanity's ever-increasing appetites. But as a species of animal, this is only natural.

Darwin states in The Origin of Species: 'Never forget that every single organic being may be said to be striving to the utmost to increase its numbers,' and Bertrand Russel writes: 'Every living thing is a sort of imperialist, seeking to transform as much as possible of its environment into itself and its seed.' Man's unprecedented power to exploit nature has been used in part to improve the quality of human life, but also in part to transform as much as possible of the environment into ever more human beings.¹⁹

While humanity's success as an organic being places the entire biosphere in jeopardy, this threat is simply because the human creature has been doing what any well-adjusted created organism would do... living with unbridled enthusiasm. And like any other organism, human beings sometimes fail to act in ways that favor their own survival. But the truly unique feature of the human organism is that it possesses the culture and knowledge to transcend mere animal behavior. It can take in the past and present, look into the future and plot to a great degree, its own evolution as a cultural species as well as the fate of the planet.

In becoming men, we have acquired the power of looking to the future and assessing the value of things. We cannot do nothing, since our very refusal to decide is a decision in itself.²⁰

The well-being of the planet earth awaits the direction human history chooses to take. The human creature stands at a cross-roads where no other creature has stood.

Humanity can choose the direction laced with 'marginality' where a few people live, literally at the expense of all life, or humanity can choose to travel in the direction of transcendence. In this direction lies the hope of the world. Should the human being choose to live for-the-world, it means transcending self-indulgence, it means restoring our broken relationship to nature, it means establishing a new relationship, a covenant with future generations by setting up societies that are just and sustainable, and it means re-establishing an attentive relationship to God, the divine 'Outer Voice'. It means that humanity must take its dominion for the benefit of all creation.

PROCESS THOUGHT AND BEAUTY: A THEOCENTRIC/RESTRUCTURING OF CURRENT 'MARGINAL' PARADIGMS

In the previous section, some possibilities for replacing 'marginality' in human conceptualizations were discussed. At the basis of much of the above mentioned discussion is a distinct anthropocentrism. That is, since human survival is based on the health of the biosphere, then those trends in human behavior which are destructive to the biosphere, (here referred to as 'marginality') must be adjusted. The inference is that nature is still only of instrumental value. An anthropocentric motivation for eliciting the necessary changes in the human/creation

relationship is valid and workable. But it is the position of this project that a Theocentric motivation for change, which also views the natural world as of intrinsic value adds a metaphysical profundity lacking in pure anthropocentrism.

Using Sanders, Knierim and von Rad, the last section showed that to be authentic to the Old Testament, God must be understood as the subject; that in fact it is God that gives reality integrity. Similarly, process thought, specifically Whitehead's understanding of Beauty, offers a unique theocentric perception of reality which views all of creation as intrinsically precious and contributing to the integrity of reality. Assuming that the reader may not be familiar with Whitehead's concept of 'strength of beauty' and the 'consequent nature of God', it is important to go, at some length, into a description of Whitehead's 'process thought'.

Whitehead's thinking, labeled 'process thought', holds that the ultimate realities of the universe are events, or occasions, in their process of 'becoming'. These occasions are only momentary and perish as soon as they come into existence. This perishing indicates the transition from the occasion which is no more, to the succeeding occasions.²¹ "Time is not a single smooth flow, but comes into being in little droplets."²² Every droplet, or occasion, because it has its own characteristics and boundaries, is individual

from all preceeding and succeeding occasions. Whitehead calls these individuals, 'actual occasions'.

It follows that these actual occasions are actualities, and in process thought, to be "an actuality is to experience creativity."²³ Creativity is the power of self-creation and other-creation. This is to say that an 'occasion of experience', or an actual occasion, receives data (feelings) from previous occasions and by including or excluding these 'feelings' in concresence, self-creates, i.e., the occasion determines its own 'subjective form'. This subjective form then becomes an object of experience for other actual occasions by transmitting some of its feelings to the actual occasions that succeed it. This process of transmitting feelings is called "transition". Thus there are two forms of creativity, concresence (self-creation) and transition (other creation). Process thought holds that our world is composed of actualities with these two forms of creative power, and that creativity is the "ultimate metaphysical principle". "Reference to creativity as the 'ultimate metaphysical principle' which lies in the nature of things indicates that the fact that the world's entities have creative power is not a contingent feature of reality. It is beyond all volition, even God's."²⁴ God as divine creative influence cannot determine the concresence of any actual occasion because the occasion is in part determined by previous occasions and

also by its own self-creative power.²⁵ But the notion of divine creativity is essential to process thought.

Whitehead's fundamentally new conception of divine creativity in the world centers around the notion that God provides each worldly actuality with "initial aim". This is an impulse, initially felt conformally by the occasion, to actualize the best possibility open to it, given its concrete situation. But this initial aim does not automatically become the subject's own aim. Rather, this "subjective aim" is a product of its own decision. The subject may choose to actualize the initial aim, but it may also choose from among the other real possibilities open to it, given its context. In other words, God seeks to persuade each occasion toward that possibility for its own existence which would be best for it, but God cannot control the finite occasion's self-actualization.²⁶

That towards which God seeks to persuade each occasion of experience is the maximization of either enjoyment or beauty.²⁷

...the self-enjoyment of an occasion of experience is initiated by an enjoyment of the past as alive in itself and is terminated by an enjoyment of itself as alive in the future. This is the account of the creative urge of the universe as it functions in each single individual occasion. In this sense, the future is immanent in each present occasion, with its particular relations to the present settled in various degrees of dominance.²⁸

Consequently, if an occasion of experience 'feels' the enjoyment of the past in itself as well as through its contribution of data to the future, then the more data the occasion can feel and pass on in objective immortality, the more enjoyment the occasion can experience. The achievement of an occasion to experience is called 'beauty'. "To maximize beauty is to maximize enjoyment."²⁹

Whitehead defines beauty as that quality which is realized in actual occasions from the adaptation of some of

the factors constituting the occasions. To put it another way, when some of the factors that make up an occasion of experience are adapted to a particular aim, some form of beauty results. The form of beauty can only be defined when the aim has been analyzed. There are two aspects to this aim. The first is the minor form of beauty, which is

the absence of mutual inhibition among the various prehensions, so that the intensities of the subjective form, which naturally and properly- or in a word, conformally- arise from the objective contents of the various prehensions, do not inhibit each other.³⁰

The second and major form of beauty includes the minor form:

... and adds to it the condition that the conjunction in one synthesis of the various prehensions introduces new contrasts of objective content with objective content. These contrasts introduce new conformal intensities of feelings natural to each of them, and by so doing raise the intensities of conformal feeling in the primitive component feelings. Thus the parts contribute to the massive feeling of the whole, and the whole contributes to the intensity of feeling of the parts.³¹

Perhaps an analogy would be helpful in understanding these two forms of beauty. Let's say the minor and major forms of beauty could be heard as musical notes. On the one hand, the minor form could be heard as a chord of six notes, all playing the note 'C' at different octaves. The objective content of the chord is absent of mutual inhibition but also of detail and interest. On the other hand, the major form of beauty could be heard as a 'C' diminished chord which still retains the note 'C', but also adds to it a synthesis of the notes 'E' (two octaves), 'G'

(two octaves) and 'B', which introduces "contrasts of objective content with objective content" resulting in a feeling of massiveness and a variety of detail.

So, the perfection of beauty requires the perfection of harmony, which in turn is the the perfection of the subjective form of detail and final synthesis. The perfection of subjective form is 'strength'. "Strength has two factors, namely, variety of detail with effective contrast which is massiveness, and Intensity Proper which is comparative magnitude without reference to qualitative varitey."³²

Whitehead defines 'perfection' as the absence from the subjective form of "component feelings which mutually inhibit each other so that neither rises to the strength proper to it."³³ He then assigns two meanings to the term 'inhibition'. The first he calls 'anaesthesia' because it literally deadens the component feelings in the subjective form that would be disruptive to the harmony. In effect, anaesthesia is like a dissonant chord with the dissonant removed. (Strictly speaking a dissonant chord with the dissonant removed is not a dissonant chord. The dissonant is an unrealized possibility.) The second meaning of the term 'inhibition' refers to the active presence of component feelings in the subective form which give rise to a "third feeling of mutual destructiveness, so that one or other- or both- of the component feelings fails to attain the strength

properly belonging to the prehension of the datum from which it arises."³⁴ This feeling is called 'aesthetic destruction' and is in a general way, the feeling of evil. Aesthetic destruction could be understood in the musical analogy as a third, painful, pulsating sound produced when two radically dissonant notes are played simultaneously at equal volume levels.

Aesthetic destruction produces 'dischordant feelings', and just as dischord can be used in music to produce a positive desired effect, dischordant feelings are a positive component in the subjective form of an occasion, even though they are not consistent with perfection.

...we shall find that always there are imperfect occasions better than occasions which realize some given type of perfection. There are in fact higher and lower perfections, and an imperfection aiming at a higher type stands above lower perfections. ...Thus the contribution to Beauty which can be supplied by Dischord- in itself destructive and evil- is the positive feeling of a quick shift of aim from the tameness of out-worn perfection to some other ideal with its freshness still upon it.³⁵

In the pursuit of new, higher forms of perfection, risks must be taken which result in dischord but also in zest, freshness and keenness of intensity. This risk is essential to the individual creativity of actual occasions and is termed 'adventure'. Without adventure (the search for new perfections) perfection is worn-out in the tedium of indefinite repetition.³⁶ In music this point could be illustrated by striking the perfection of a 'C' Major triad, and for the sake of excluding the possibility of dischord

from that perfection, never striking any chord but that identical 'C' Major triad. Clearly, it would not be long before the tedium of the repetition of even a perfect chord would be unbearable.

...adventure is needed- the adventure of ideas. The best service that ideas can render is gradually to lift into the mental poles the ideal of another type of perfection which becomes a program for reform.³⁷

This reform, spurred on by the adventure of ideas, is what is known as progress.

Thus far, two ways of dealing with dischord have been discussed. The first was 'anaesthesia', that is, the simple elimination of dischordant factors by not prehending them, called negative prehension. The second was aesthetic destruction, or the positive actualization of a positive feeling of dischord where "the elimination of the sheer incompatibility is accomplished by a positive feeling of accute disruption of affective tone."³⁸

A third way involves the readjustment of the intensities of incompatible feelings and thus rendering them compatible. For example, in the 'C' Diminished chord mentioned earlier, the 'C' and the 'B' played together at identical volume levels produces a fighting of tones, an incompatibility. If, however, the volume, or intensity of the 'B' is reduced so that its presence becomes a background which has the effect of raising the 'C' to the foreground, then the incompatibility becomes a compatibility which at the same time provides massiveness and variety. This third

method Whitehead terms 'reduction to a background'.

There is yet a fourth way of dealing with incompatibilities open to those occasions of experience where the higher activities of mentality have been developed. This method involves the spontaneous creation by the occasion of experience of an additional system of prehensions which is relevant to the inharmonious systems. This spontaneous system of prehensions alters the importance of the incompatible prehensions so as to preserve them from negative prehension. This fourth method is the introduction of 'appearance'.³⁹

The variety of individual intensities thwart each other by their diversities of objects. Appearance combines massiveness with intensity by unifying the diversities of objects. It simplifies the objects and precipitates upon the simplification the qualitative contents of the given world.⁴⁰

The intensities and massiveness of an occasion of experience is saved through the transference of fact into a distinctness of feeling. This distinct feeling or tone of an occasion is its appearance. In spite of the limitations of analogy, it may be helpful in the conceptualization of appearance to think of the occasion of experience as a symphonic movement. The movement consists of many different instruments, themes, notes, rhythms and dynamics, all of which may elicit a vivid feeling such as anger, peacefulness or gaiety to the movement as a whole. This feeling from the massiveness and intensities of the symphonic objects is the appearance of the movement.

Appearance is also the way through which a particular region of reality is recognized by the experient subject as possessing some significant individuality. That is to say that the occasions of experience which occupy a region of reality gain significance as an individual when the occasions are superceded by appearance.

Appearance has been constituted fortunately when it has simplified the welter of occasions, individually insignificant, into a few significant individual things. It has 'interpreted' the world in terms of factors received from the world...41

Strength of experience is derived from the concurrence of these significant individual objects. This substratum of detail is the enjoyment of harmony, "and a factor in this enjoyment is the intuition that the future, where its objective immortality lies, is increasing the grounds for Harmony."42 Conversely, there can be strength of experience without harmony. When there is the destruction of the significant characters of individual objects and when the feeling of such destruction dominates the experience, "there is the immediate feeling of evil, and the anticipation of destructive or weakened data for the future."43

Before this discussion of beauty is complete, the notion of 'truth' and its role in the strength of beauty must be quickly examined. Truth is the conformation of appearance to reality. In order for a truth-relation to exist, the objective contents of appearance and the objective contents of reality must have some factor in

common. While truth is not necessarily beautiful and a low-level of beauty can be attained without a truth-relation, the most simple and direct mode for beauty to realize harmony is the truth-relation. The ultimate form of beauty discovers some hidden, penetrating truth.

The truth that for such extremity of Beauty is wanted is that truth-relation whereby Appearance summons up new resources of feeling from the depths of reality.

When Appearance has to Reality, in some important sense, a truth relation, there is a security about the Beauty attained, that is to say, a pledge for the future.⁴⁴

Whitehead's thought offers a unique way of viewing the created world. Flowers and squirrels are of intrinsic value because they are responsive, they feel. Human beings are likewise of value because they too are responsive. All occasions of experience do feel and pass their feelings on to the next occasion of experience. The enjoyment of experience is Beauty.

The Beauty an occasion of experience feels is felt not only by the later occasions which choose toprehend the beauty as data, but the quality and quantity of the strength of Beauty experienced by the entire universe is totalled in the 'Consequent nature of God'. Whitehead conceives of God as fully actual. God is "responsive to and receptive of the worldly actualizations"⁴⁵

This divine reality is not limited to a 'bare knowledge' of the new things happening in the world. Rather, the responsiveness includes a sympathetic feeling with the worldly beings, all of whom have feelings. Hence, it is not merely the content of God's knowledge which is dependent, but God's own emotional state. God enjoys

our enjoyments, and suffers with our sufferings. This is the kind of responsiveness which is truly divine and belongs to the very nature of perfection.⁴⁶

It is in the consequent nature of God that the value of Beauty introduced by the contrasts among species and the variety of feelings in the universe find their ultimate meaning and significance. In process thought the integrity of reality is affirmed because God is responsive to and sympathetic with the feelings of worldly beings. All of the created world has intrinsic value not only because it is responsive but because the feelings of creation are felt by God as well. As a result, that which adds to the 'strength of Beauty' in the universe is good, and that which diminishes the 'strength of Beauty' felt by the universe is evil.

Since 'strength of Beauty' is desirable, a process perspective would take the biblical directive to be 'fruitful and multiply' very seriously. Because human beings are capable of experiencing massive amounts of beauty, the more human biomass that the earth can adequately and sustainably support, the greater the strength of Beauty humanity contributes to the universe. Thus science and technology are valued aspects to a process perspective because using these tools, the earth can sustain more human 'feeling' biomass. At the same time the 'feelings' of all aspects of nature are of value and supply 'variety' which strengthens the feeling of Beauty enjoyed by the universe.

Always in process thought is an emphasis on the goodness of enhanced feeling and the evil of diminished feeling. As a result human science and technology is only desirable if it preserves the natural world and enhances the quality and quantity of Beauty contributed by creation.

The thesis of this project states that basic to the correction of contemporary trends toward resource depletion and human violence with tendencies toward the stress of the entire eco-shpere of planet Earth is the need to replace the notion of 'marginality' with a spirituality that acknowledges the integrity of reality and values all resources as being intrinsically precious. Process thought, with its theocentrism and emphasis on the ultimate value of the 'feelings' of all occasions of experience, offers an alternative compatible with the need expressed above.

SUMMARY

This chapter began with a review of the notion of 'marginality'. 'Marginality' has been discussed as a contributing factor to the rationale in Western thought which has led to land practices resulting in soil loss and destruction and much more. Thinking in terms of 'marginality' has resulted in resource stress and consumption as well as in polluting the biosphere. Furthermore, 'marginality' has impoverished the human

species as it has nature. Very few individuals reap the benefits of 'marginal' practices, and even those few suffer from resource scarcity, poisoned environments and from the poverty of alienation in the world community. Even for the few, 'marginality' is only of marginal benefit.

It is clear that thinking in terms of the notion of 'marginality' will destroy the world from any number of possibilities. If this planet is to survive, 'marginal' thinking must be removed from Western thought and practice.

The concept of a sustainable society was introduced as the only possibility for cultural survival. A sustainable is one which has: 1) zero population growth; 2) zero-growth in the use of consumable goods; 3) the stabilization of resource consumption at a sustainable level; 4) the distribution of resources to where they are most needed; and 5) keeping pollutants at a level below the absorption capacity of the earth.

One way to overcome 'marginal' thinking and assist the development of a sustainable society is to correct our interpretation of the biblical creation account to recognize that God is the subject of Genesis 1 and humanity, as one of the created, is the object. Human 'dominion' therefore, is a divine appointment where humanity is to care for God's creation in a manner consistent with God's will which insures the continuance of all life. In short, Genesis 1 attempts to show that reality is not fragmented

and purposeless, but that there is an integrity to reality, this integrity is God the creator and sustainer.

While human beings are a part of the 'created' world, they possess the unique possibility to transcend animal behavior which tends to be short-visioned and self-seeking. A sustainable and just society is only possible if humans transcend exploitative behavior with a new relationship which nurtures the natural world and establishes a relationship of covenant with future generations.

The second part of Chapter IV introduced 'process thought' as a possibility in overcoming 'marginal' thinking and assisting with the task of forming a sustainable society. Process thought holds that all aspects of the created world have intrinsic value on an individual and collective basis. Individually, every natural object possesses 'feelings', i.e., during each occasion of experience, the occasion itself enjoys the past as alive in itself and enjoys itself as alive in its contribution to the future. These 'feelings' of enjoyment, or 'Beauty', are of ultimate value in process thought. Consequently, whether one is concerned with the feelings of a worm or of a human being, what is of intrinsic worth are the 'feelings' of each natural object. While a human being is capable of experiencing a higher degree of 'Beauty' than a worm, the 'Beauty' experienced by the worm is still of intrinsic worth and must not be discounted.

The 'Beauty' experienced by natural objects has value collectively in that all the 'feelings' of the natural world: rocks, trees, worms, humans etc., contribute to the 'strength of Beauty' of the universe as a whole. Where this universal 'strength of Beauty' is totalled is in the 'consequent nature of God'. God 'feels' the collective 'Beauty' of the universe. The various 'feelings' of all the different aspects of creation add to the massiveness and intensity of the 'Beauty' God experiences. As a result, for process thought, what is ultimately good is anything that maximizes the 'strength of Beauty' of the universe. Each individual object of creation contributes its own special experience to the 'strength of Beauty' felt by God. Therein lies the intrinsic value of each created object and in God's enjoyment of the variety of the universe lies the integrity of reality.

Life on planet Earth depends upon humanity's acceptance of a spirituality acknowledging all resources as intrinsic with the understanding that human 'dominion' is entrusted by God for the well-being and continuance of all life.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The ecology of planet Earth is in grave danger. Due to the lack of sustainable ecological trends in Western economic and technological practices, the air and water are polluted, the soil is depleted, natural resources are consumed at alarming rates and the existence of life itself is threatened.

Essential to the correction of contemporary trends toward resource depletion and human violence with tendencies toward the stress of the entire eco-sphere of the planet is the need to replace the notion of 'marginality', as it has been used in this project, with a spirituality that acknowledges all resources as being intrinsic.

SUMMARY

'Marginality' has been defined in this project as the fallacious notion that the value of the natural world is established by its usefulness to humanity. Implicit in this utilitarian view of creation is the assertion that natural resources on the fringes of human economic usefulness and profit-earning ability are also of little or no intrinsic value. Likewise, through 'marginal' thinking, resources

such as oil and top-soil are exploited and depleted for their profit-earning ability and therefore denied intrinsic worth.

In addition, 'marginality' denies that reality has integrity. In this fragmented world-view, the human realm is separated from the rest of creation which allows for unchecked exploitation of the natural world. The notion of 'marginality' denies that creation is a manifestation of God's creative spirit and purpose.

'Marginality' is clearly evidenced in Western society's land and resource use patterns. While civilization is directly linked to the ability of agricultural land to produce food and other useful crops, humanity's relationship to agricultural land over the thousands of years of cultivation has, for the most part, continued to be one of exploitation and destruction. Even as the world population increases and the world agricultural land-base decreases, Western farming practices tend to trade the precious soil for temporary economic growth. This utilitarian understanding of land, where the soil is valued less than the dollars it earns, is evidence of the notion of 'marginality' in contemporary thought. This living for today's gain with little or no thought to the anthropocentric construct of the human value hierarchy, is the indictment of 'marginality'.

A utilitarian, profit-motivated understanding of

resources is the expression of the wider philosophical/theological notion of 'marginality' which views the created world as fragmented. When reality is viewed as fragmented, there can be no integrity, no relationship of interrelatedness or interdependence between the different objects of the created world and between creation and God. Western civilization's 'marginal' conceptualization of the natural world denies its intrinsic value as a part of God's creation and its significance in the evolution of God's will.

Some of the roots of 'marginal' thinking can be attributed to a misinterpretation of the meanings the Hebrew words 'dominion' and 'subdue' found in the creation account in Genesis 1. Also Christianity's monotheism tended to de-spiritualize the natural world leaving the door open for a 'marginal' re-interpretation of creation. Anthropocentric thought which understands the natural world as a stage on which the drama of human history is acted out also has contributed to 'marginality's' utilitarian view of creation. In addition, 'marginal' thought is comfortably nurtured in the basic human fear of losing what has been acquired. Acting responsibly for the well-being of all life on the planet means facing over-whelming demands which threaten our life-style and thus our security. The 'Jonah Complex' is a rejection or ambivalence toward our real greatness, our God-given task of living-for-the-world.

Western thought patterns are so heavily laced with 'marginality' and our culture so dependant on a 'marginal' fragmented exploitation of the natural world, that to replace 'marginal' thinking with a spirituality viewing all aspects of creation as intrinsically precious calls for a total revamping of human value constructs.

The concept of a sustainable society must replace present 'marginal' paradigms if human culture and much of the life on this planet are to survive. A sustainable society would have: 1) zero population growth; 2) zero growth in the use of consumable goods; 3) the stabilization of resource consumption at a sustainable level; 4) the distribution of resources to where they are most needed; and 5) keeping pollutants at a level below the absorption capacity of the earth.

One step on the way to overcoming 'marginal' thinking is to correct our interpretation of the biblical creation account to recognize that God is the subject of Genesis 1. Human 'dominion' over the natural world is confined to caring for God's creation in a manner consistent with God's will that all life may have continuance. Genesis 1 attempts to show that reality is not fragmented and purposeless, but that there is an integrity to reality, this integrity is God the creator and sustainer.

For humanity to overcome 'marginal' thinking, humans must transcend short-visioned and self-seeking behavior. A

sustainable and just society is only possible when humans transcend exploitative behavior with a new relationship which nurtures the natural world and establishes a relationship of covenant with future generations.

Process thought offers a metaphysics which can replace 'marginal' thinking in that it asserts that all aspects of the created world have intrinsic value on an individual and collective basis. The enjoyment or 'Beauty' felt by each occasion of experience makes every individual occasion intrinsically precious since in process thought, 'Beauty' is of ultimate value. Furthermore, since the 'Beauty' enjoyed by each individual occasion of experience contributes to the overall 'strength of Beauty' experienced by God, every aspect of creation has an intrinsic part in the integrity of creation.

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter the alternative of the sustainable society was introduced as the only possibility available to human civilization other than destruction due to our current ecological dilemma. It was also pointed out that the premises of the sustainable society, i.e. zero population growth, zero growth in consumable resources, just distribution of resources and zero growth in pollutants, are dependant upon a revolution in humanity's relationship to

the natural world. For the purposes of this project, this revolution could be termed 'an ethic of transcendant relationship'. This ethic is called 'transcendant' because humanity must transcend the patterns of relationship that, from the beginning, have helped make the human being a biological success, and more recently, the world an endangered bio-system.

Albert Schweitzer writes

"...if the domain of ethics is limited to the relations of man to man, then every effort to arrive at a fundamental ethical principle which has an absolutely binding content is hopeless from the beginning. The absolute and universal belong together. If there really is a fundamental principle of ethics, it must somehow refer to the relation of man to life as such in all of its manifestations.¹

Schweitzer writes that "reverence for the infinity of life means removal of the alienation, restoration of empathy, compassion, sympathy,"² or in the terms of this project, an ethic of transcendant relationship. That is to say, an ethic which gives intrinsic value to the 'feelings' of the total environment, including God.

We need a valuation of the creation that has within it a hierarchy of intrinsic value (of man and of sparrows) and which includes the concept of the rights of non-human nature. If existence of this earth is to be sustained it may be by a perilously slight margin of sensitiveness of those who value nature for more than its use, to use with what Paul Verghese calls the 'reverent-receptive attitude.'³

The Christian ministry and the Christian church have a unique role in bringing into fruition this 'ethic of transcendant relationship'. In the previous chapter's

discussion of Beauty, Whitehead introduced the notion of 'truth-relation' as the conformation of appearance to reality. In the past, humanity has had many varied relationships to the cosmos, but for the most part, the 'appearance' of these relationships has been one where there has been a removed but distinct feeling of evil..."the anticipation of destructive or weakened data for the future."⁴ The destruction of species, resources and the pollution of the bio-sphere certainly has conveyed the feeling, or an intuition that the strength of beauty in the future has been weakened by the human relationship to the world.

The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth suggest for ministry, a new relationship between humanity and God, humanity and nature and among human beings themselves. The Christian Gospel has to reality, a 'truth-relation'; the ultimate beauty made possible by the Gospel discovers some hidden, penetrating truth that is 'a pledge for the future'.⁵ In a profound way, the truth uncovered in the Gospel is an ethic for transcending destructive relationships and in so doing calls the human being onto new, ever more beautiful possibilities.

Christian ministry needs to be re-evaluated within the larger context of relationship. 'Larger' because relationship is a metaphysical principle of the cosmos. Without relationships there could be no enduring objects.

It is the relationship between electrons, protons and neutrons that give those distinct particles the identity of an atom. And it is the relationship between atoms that gives identity to a molecule. A metaphysical law, such as the law of gravity, is but the identification of the relationship between enduring objects having mass.

Consequently, using this same reasoning, an enduring individual such as a human being is a complex network of relationships. This is to say that the human individual is made up of relationships such as; the relationship between sub-atomic particles to form atoms; the relationship between atoms to form molecules; the relationship between molecules to form cells; the relationship between cells to form organs, bones and tissue; and the relationship of all the different cell groupings to form the human body.

However, the relationships just enumerated are not unique to human individuals. All living individuals however simple or complex are in addition, in relationship to their environment and therefore in relationship with all other individuals, past, present and future.

What makes human individuals unique among other individuals is: 1) our ability to be in relationship with a wide variety of environments and, to an increasing degree, adapt aspects of our environment to fit our relationship needs; 2) our ability to relate in a conscious manner with past and future generations; and 3) our ability to

consciously relate to our Creator, i.e. God. The task of ministry, then, is to assist the human individual to participate in these unique human relationship possibilities in nurturing, intentional, holistic and universal ways. The presupposition of the Christian ministry is that by increasing the health of the human/Creator relationship, the relationships between human individuals and our environment, other individuals and all consequent individuals will be enhanced. This 'enhancement' is of benefit to all of creation.

The Christian ministry follows the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth because Jesus not only demonstrated a new possibility for relating to God and the world, but his life and death became the embodiment of that relationship possibility. That is, Jesus as the 'Christ', the 'New Being' offers a radically new possibility for humanity to renew and enliven our relationship with God and the whole of creation. This is the Good News and this is the task of ministry: to work to renew and enliven each individual's relationship with God and all of creation in light of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Humanity is 'fallen' to the degree that it denies its potential to live in a just, participatory and sustainable relationship with creation. 'Fallen' here does not mean that humanity has fallen or descended from a prior state of grace, 'fallen' means that humanity has 'fallen short' of

the kind of relationships God would have us attain. For human beings and human societies to be short-sighted, consumptive, oppressive and self-seeking is only natural. We share these characteristics with all other organisms on this planet. But human beings have the ability to transcend this 'I'-centeredness, this self-gratifying nature of relating which is responsible for the peril our planet is facing. It is to humanity's ability to transcend itself and relate in a new mode that the message of Jesus of Nazareth is directed and it is because Jesus' message has found a receptive home in the transcendent aspect of the human character that the Gospel has lived so long.

Endnotes

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APPENDIX

SERMON

"WATCH OUT FOR THAT WATER!":/A Call to Christian
Responsibility.

Several years ago, Jan and I moved to Atlanta Georgia so I could begin school at Candler School of Theology. I'm sure that most of you are familiar with the hassles and headaches of moving and re-locating in an area which is totally unfamiliar. Well, our move had all the regular headaches plus the added complication of being low on money,... and we had no job leads. So as soon as our telephone was hooked up, we started to search through the 'Job Opportunities' column in the Atlanta Journal Constitution. On every application form we faithfully printed our new telephone number so that all the prospective employers could easily get in touch with us. But after about a week had gone by without one call-back, we began to get concerned. (It's a dangerous thing to live on rot-gut peanut-butter and budget hot-dogs.) Finally it occurred to us to test our telephone, and sure enough, it wasn't working. We could call out but nobody could call us. Needless to say we were a bit panicked. Our money was almost gone and none of the companies with whom we made application could get in touch with us! Immediately we called Southern Bell and explained the problem to the

service operator. The operator said that it was impossible for us to have the number we had been given and that we needed to talk with the supervisor. After explaining the problem again to the supervisor, I was told that she didn't know anything about the problem and that I needed to talk to the head of the supervisors, kind of a super-supervisor. After talking to the super-supervisor and the work crew supervisor I was assured that the phone would be working correctly in three days. ...After three days when the phone was still not working, I went through the same process again, only talking to different people, and I was again assured that the phone would be working in three days-- well actually five days because of the weekend.... This mess went on for three weeks, nobody would take responsibility for the problem or, more importantly, for fixing the problem.

After three weeks of being bounced from desk to desk and three weeks of peanut-butter induced constipation, at last I wised up. Somebody had to be responsible for Southern Bell and I figured that person had to be the General Manager. So the next morning I placed a person to person call to the General Manager of Southern Bell. I must have refused to talk with ten people before I finally got to talk with the man. After explaining the problem in vivid detail, the General Manager responded with, "Mr. Lieder, I'm sorry for your inconvenience, the phone will be working in

two hours." Thirty-minutes later our phone rang for the first time. At last after talking to a vertible army of Southern Bell employees, somebody took responsibility for the problem. Of all the people in Southern Bell, the General Manager was probably the least to blame for the problem, yet he was willing to be identified as a participant in the problem and was willing to take the blame for things not being right, and willing to see to it that the necessary changes were made in order to solve the problem. The General Manager was willing to let the buck stop with him.

Passing the buck is not unique to Southern Bell. Anyone who has dealt with a large corporation knows what it feels like to be passed from desk to desk. Somehow it seems to be a natural human trait to pass the buck, to try to 'slip' out of responsibility. Someone who dodges responsibility and can never be pinned down long enough to take the blame for anything is sometimes called 'slick'. To be 'slick' is something we learn early. If a group of children are playing softball and the ball goes through a window, the last person off the field is the one who catches the blame for the whole gang. ...But to be 'slick' makes good sense. Who in their right mind wants to get caught, to take the blame... and to take the punishment when things go wrong? The worst part is that it is usually 'slick' who is really responsible for the problem and everybody else who

gets the blame.

If being 'slick', or begging responsibility were only contained to corporate desk shuffling or childhood games, it wouldn't be much of an issue this morning. But being 'slick', this evasion of responsibility goes far beyond harmless buck passing. We have all heard the horrible stories of muggings, rapes and murders taking place on crowded city streets where passers-by passed by with barely a glance. Does it take an evil person, someone totally unconcerned with the well-being of others to walk by a brutalizing situation and do nothing? When is it alright to be 'slick' and when is it important for us to stay and take responsibility even at some personal risk?

This morning we are still in the season of Epiphany. One of the central scriptural lessons of this time of year tells of Jesus' baptism. It is here at Jesus' baptism that the light hidden in the man from Nazareth breaks forth and begins to illuminate the world. In Isaiah 42:1-4, which we read this morning, God foretells of this coming Messiah, cloaked in the Holy Spirit, bringing a message of hope to those who, like bruised reeds or dimly burning wicks, are down and out. This Messiah will bring a total reordering of the world. ...Now, John knows that this Messiah will soon arrive and takes upon himself the responsibility of preparing the nation to receive this king. He prepares the nation by baptizing the people. According to the Law, anyone who

wished to worship in the tabernacle who was diseased or impure, needed to be ceremonially washed before entering the house of worship. John, in the tradition of the Law, saw as his task the cleansing of a diseased Israel in order to prepare the way for the lord. John was baptizing the impure people of Israel to clean them of their sins. So, can you imagine John's confusion when Jesus, the man John knew was the Messiah, came to be cleansed, to be purified through baptism?

Theologically speaking, this is where the fat hits the fire. Why would Jesus, considered by many in the Christian tradition to be not only perfect but the son of God as well, why did this Messiah insist on being baptized? Remember that in Jesus' day, baptism was a purification ritual. So, when Jesus came to John to be baptized, his baptism could easily and logically be interpreted as an admission of sinfulness! Why would Jesus insist on being baptized? ...I don't think Jesus wanted to be cleansed of the sins of his youth, and I doubt very much that Jesus was concerned with whether or not he was perfect, even though that has been a big topic for biblicists throughout the ages with nothing else to do. No,... the importance of Jesus' baptism for us, and for that matter, all of creation, is that while Jesus may or may not have been responsible for the sins of the world, he was willing to accept responsibility. When Jesus insisted that John baptize him,

he chose to be identified as one of us, ..he chose to side with the sinners. Jesus claimed the corruption and sinfulness of the world as his own and thereby took as his task the overcoming of the sins of our world. In that action he added to the Old Testament notion of the Messiah as the one who comes to save the world, the totally novel notion of servant. Jesus came to save the world by serving the world. And notice, it was after Jesus' baptism that the spirit of God descended upon him and said "Behold, this is my son with whom I am well pleased." I can't help but wonder what changes there would have been if Jesus had instead said 'Get out of the water John! I'm too 'slick' to be baptized and I'm not responsible for the sins of this world."

After nineteen hundred and fifty years, our understanding of baptism has altered some. Today baptism is not a ritual to cleanse the individual of impurities, but instead, marks the person as a member of the community of faith and forever that person is one of God's people. But, while the concept of baptism has changed over the years, the responsibility of that sacrament remains intact. There should be a warning on the baptismal fount that 'the use of this water may be hazardous to your way of life.' When the cool water of the river Jordan was placed on Jesus, he became forever inextricably entangled in all the workings of the world, good and bad. The man from Nazareth did not pick

and choose to be involved with this leper but not that adulterer, or be responsible for this prisoner but not that tax collector. When Jesus by his baptism said 'the buck stops here' he meant that he took responsibility for all people, everywhere, for all time, regardless of how blameless Jesus himself might have been. That water was potent stuff! Not only did it drive a carpenter's son to carry the burdens of the world through the wilderness and highways of Palestine, but it drove that man to a garden, then to a hill and a grizzly massacre the impact of which has left the world reeling for 2000 years. Watch out for that water, once it had enough power to clean up the world!

Yes, we should be warned about that water. If someone had told me about that stuff before I was baptized, I certainly would have given the matter a little bit more thought. Baptism makes us forever a member of the Christian community of faith which means we try to follow the teachings of Christ, and the teachings of Christ tell us that when we are baptised every man is my brother and every woman is my sister and the well-being of everyone and everything on this earth is my responsibility!! As Christians we can't be 'slick' about anything and still be living a Christian life. Watch out for that water, because as tired as we may be, enough is never enough as long as people remain unfed, and oppressed. Rationalize and philosophize and economize as we may, we are not followers

of Jesus unless we accept responsibility for every individual on this earth. OUR task is to continue to bring in that for which Jesus lived and died. OUR task is to continue on with Jesus' task of bringing God's kingdom into fruition.. and that can't happen if we try to be 'slick'.

Alfred North Whitehead, whom I have quoted in the Preparation for Worship, is absolutely right. Jesus' teaching expresses a naivete totally irrelevant and impractical to the actual problems of power and order in today's world, yet here we are! All of us standing in precarious balance with one foot tentatively planted in a world whose order, politics, economics and demands we understand very well, and the other foot tentatively planted on the uncertain, impractical and idealistic soil of God's kingdom. We are frightened, you and I, of the responsibility Jesus calls us to take. But we are here, and we are on our way. Because Jesus' message, like Isaiah predicted, calls for a complete reordering of our world, his words throw us into a kind of ...tizzy, we're not sure we can live it yet. And the few people who have tried, who chose to plant both feet on God's soil, like Martin Luther King, have scared us to death. ...But there is hope. That a church the size and influence of the United Methodist Church can have for its social creed that which we read this morning, is cause for hope. That this morning millions of people world-wide, bearing the consecrating sign of the

dangerous, challenging water of baptism, are attempting to understand and align their lives with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and are slowly bringing God's kingdom into fruition, is a great cause for hope. Yet in these days there is another movement, a counter movement to God's kingdom. This movement struggles for power and military supremacy, it is a movement which exploits the earth, nature and the people of the earth and claws for immediate gain at all costs. Amid all the causes for hope, it is still reasonable to ask 'when will Christians take it upon themselves to be responsible for all God's sons and daughters?' As our air turns acid, our water becomes poison, our farmlands become deserts and our lives are lived in the shadow of war, it is reasonable to ask 'if we hesitate much longer, will there be enough time?'

This morning I seriously urge us all to ask of ourselves in what ways am I being 'slick' and avoiding my responsibility as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth? The completion of the Kingdom of God, the very survival of life itself is totally dependant upon each of us to claim our share of the responsibility.. In God's name.

(Preached January 16, 1983 at Newport Center United Methodist Church, Corona Del Mar, California.)

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